ARMY BOYS IN THE BIG DRIVE

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Army Boys in the Big Drive

Once a shell exploded just behind them, throwing the wagon forward and almost hurling the boys out.

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ARMY BOYS IN THE BIG DRIVE

OR

SMASHING FORWARD TO VICTORY

HOMER RANDALL

AUTHOR OF "ARMY BOYS IN FRANCE," "ARMY BOYS IN THE FRENCH TRENCHES," ETC.

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ARMY BOYS IN THE BIG DRIVE

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ARMY BOYS IN THE BIG DRIVE

CHAPTER I

HEMMED IN

"TIGHTEST place we were ever in, fellows!" exclaimed Frank Sheldon, as he crouched low in the shelter of a fallen tree.

"Right you are," panted Bart Raymond, his special chum, as he dashed the perspiration from his forehead with a smoke-grimed hand.

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Billy Waldon, reloading his rifle, which was so hot from rapid firing that his fingers flinched when he touched it. "I've seen times when our lives didn't seem worth a copper cent. The time, for instance, when the Uhlans chased us over the broken bridge. But we pulled through all right that time, and I'll bet we shall now."

"I hope your hunch is right," grunted Tom Bradford, as he bound a rag around a finger that had been grazed by a bullet; "but I don't think any life insurance company would be willing to take a chance on us at this minute."

It was a hot day in August. The sun beat down fiercely and a stifling mist rose from the steaming ground in a dense piece of forest, where a little

company of American Army boys were fighting for their lives against enemies who greatly outnumbered them.

Already they had held out for hours, and although some of their comrades had been killed and others wounded, they had no thought of surrender.

Yet, when in a pause in the fighting they had time to think, it seemed to them that they had been caught in a trap from which there was no escape.

For several days the American army, flushed with victory, had been driving the Huns before them. The Germans, with the Americans thundering at their heels, were fleeing from France, leaving large numbers of men and guns in the victors' hands.

But on the day in question the enemy had turned at bay and made a determined stand. The commanding officer had hurried up fresh divisions, including some of the famous Prussian Guards, and had hurled them into the fighting.

The old Thirty-Seventh Regiment, as it had originally been called, to which Frank and his friends belonged, had been pressed back by overwhelming numbers. Frank's company, which had been in the van, was cut off from the rest of the regiment and surrounded on all sides.

"Down, fellows!" shouted Frank, as a hand grenade came whirling through the trees and fell within ten feet of them.

Like a flash they dropped to the ground, and the splinters from the exploding missile passed harmlessly over their heads.

"Lucky there were no rheumatics in this bunch," grinned Billy, as he rose to his feet.

"One has to move mighty quickly when those little teasers come along," agreed Bart.

"I saw the fellow who threw that," remarked Tom, as he rested his rifle on the stump of a tree and ran his eye along the barrel.

The rifle cracked, and a gray-clad figure threw up its hands and fell in a crumpled heap.

"That's one less of them, anyway," muttered Tom.

"Good eye, old scout," approved Billy.

"I wish it had been the Kaiser," ejaculated Frank.

A rattling volley of rifle fire from the enemy made the whole company duck for cover.

"It's good these trees are so big," commented Frank.

"I wonder how many of those Heinies there are, anyway," said Tom. "Looks as if we were fighting the whole German army."

"Not quite so bad as that," laughed Frank,

"but there's a mighty big raft of them, judging by the way those bullets come whistling along."

"I didn't think there was so much fight left in them," remarked Billy. "They've been making tracks so fast these last few days that it looked as if they were not going to stop till they got to Berlin."

"Maybe they've just done that to catch us napping," suggested Tom.

"Any one who thinks the Heinies are all in has another guess coming," observed Frank. "They will take a lot of beating before we drive them over the Rhine."

I wonder what became of the old Thirty-Seventh," said Bart.

"Fighting like tigers, you can bet," responded Frank.

"They've got their work cut out for them," put in Billy. "These Prussian guards are a husky lot of scrappers, and there must have been at least three to one against our boys this morning."

"Our boys will drive them back all right," said Bart confidently. "They caught us off our stride the other day, but it won't last."

"I shouldn't be surprised any minute," said Tom, "to see the old regiment come tearing through these woods to get us out of this hole."

"They think we're dead probably," sighed Frank.

"A good many of the boys are," said Bart grimly, as he looked sadly about him at the silent figures of some who would never fire another shot. "And it's only a matter of time before they get the rest of us; they have certainly got us in a trap," he added.

"It's a wonder the Boches don't rush us," remarked Billy.

At that moment their corporal, Wilson, came along. The second lieutenant who had led the company into battle that morning had been killed and the sergeant wounded so that the greatly diminished squad was now under the corporal's command.

"Still plugging at it, boys?" he said with a smile, as their rifles went off almost simultaneously.

"Giving them the best we've got," responded Frank, as he felt for his cartridge belt.

"I want one of you boys for special work," said the corporal, looking at each in turn, "but it's too dangerous for me to pick any one out. I don't want to take the responsibility of sending any man to his death, and that's what it's likely to be. Who'll volunteer?"

"I will!" shouted Frank.

"Take me!" cried Bart.

"Here!" called Billy.

"Let me go," chimed in Tom.

The corporal's eyes gleamed with pride.

"Young game cocks," he muttered to himself.

He put his hand on Frank's shoulder.

"You've had a lot of experience in scouting, Sheldon," he said. "I want you to make your way through that gully over there"—he pointed to a ravine at the right—"and find how strong the enemy is in that direction. Sooner or later we've got to cut our way out of this, and I want to get the lay of the land. Report to me in five minutes."

"All right, sir," replied Frank, and the officer passed on.

"Some fellows have all the luck," said Bart, enviously.

"If Frank fell in the water he wouldn't get wet," chimed in Billy.

"If it were raining soup, I'd only have a fork," grumbled Tom.

"Stop your kicking," said Frank. "You'll have plenty of chances later on."

"But say, old man," said Bart anxiously, "how about grub? You may get stuck out there in the woods and not be able to get back. You'd better take some of mine with you."

"That's right," said Tom as he reached for his scanty rations

Billy made a similar motion, but Frank laughingly protested.

"We're not passing the hat just yet," he said. "Wilson will see about that."

In less than five minutes he was standing before the corporal.

"All ready, Sheldon?" asked the latter.

"All ready, sir," responded Frank.

There was silence for a moment while the corporal pondered. The death of his superior officers had put an unaccustomed responsibility upon his shoulders. He was an experienced soldier, had seen service in the Philippines and elsewhere, and was as brave as a lion; but he had never before this moment been thrown suddenly into the command of so large a body of men. His forehead was creased and his voice tense with anxiety as he spoke.

"I can speak freely to you, Sheldon," he said, "because we've been together in a great many scraps, and I know the stuff you're made of. We're in a bad fix. The regiment has been forced back—how far I don't know, but, from the booming of the big guns, it's a long way off. We've got to do one of two things, either hold out here till the regiment comes for us, as I know they will soon or late, or else we'll have to make a rush and cut our way through."

"I see, sir," said Frank, all attention.

"As for sticking it out here," resumed the corporal, "I'm not keen for it. The men haven't much food with them, and although the Huns don't seem inclined to rush us and we've got pretty good cover in these thick woods, it's only a matter of time before they pick us off, one by one. If we've got to go west, I want to do it fighting hard, rather than die like a rat in a trap."

"Right you are, sir," said Frank with glistening eyes.

"You'll need all the Indian stuff you've got, Sheldon," the corporal went on, "but you've proved that you're the best man in the regiment when it comes to scouting, and I don't have to give you any advice about that. What I want to do is to find the weakest point in the enemy's lines so that we'll know where to make our dash."

"I'd start up that gully if I were you, and circle around the whole position. Of course you can't take your rifle, but here's my automatic pistol," and he drew the weapon from his belt and put it into Frank's hand.

"Take good care of yourself, Sheldon," he concluded, "for the old Thirty-Seventh can't afford to lose the best man it's got."

"I'll do my best, sir," said Frank.

"I know you will," said the corporal. "Good

luck." Then he hurried away to another part of the line that needed his attention.

In a moment Frank had rushed back to his friends, gripped their hands in what each knew might be a last farewell, and hastened on his mission.

His quick brain had already sized up the situation and decided on the course to follow.

The woods were unusually thick and afforded good opportunity for concealment. The ground was hilly and at places rose to considerable heights. If he could attain these he might have a chance to see the number and position of his foes.

Dropping on hands and knees, he wormed his way through the heavy underbrush, every muscle tense, his quick brain on the alert, his keen eyes darting from right to left as he made his way forward.

CHAPTER II

A SUDDEN SPRING

In a few moments Frank had reached the borders of a narrow ravine. Its general trend was upward, and it was along the path of the gully that he had decided he could most readily reach the wooded knoll that he had fixed upon as a point of observation.

The bottom of the gully was rough and rocky, and a tiny stream ran through it. In this he bathed his hands and face, and then went on, exercising the utmost care, and drawing closer and closer to where he knew the enemy's lines must be.

Soon he reached a point where the gully rose to the general level of the woods, and here his precautions redoubled.

Suddenly he heard the chink of a weapon and a guttural exclamation. Like a flash he dropped flat on the ground, and peered in the direction from which the sound proceeded.

The locality was pitted with shell holes which had been made by the big guns in the fierce fighting of the day before, some of them deep enough

to conceal a man, even though he stood at his full height.

As Frank looked about he saw the spike of a helmet rising above the edge of one of the craters. It rose higher, and then Frank saw the face of a German soldier half revealed.

There was a quick motion as the Hun raised his rifle, fired in the direction of the American position, and then dodged back under cover.

At that moment a plan came to Frank like lightning. He had seen that the man was about the same height as himself and slightly thicker in build. From where Frank lay, hugging the earth, he was facing the enemy. With the utmost caution, and using all his wood craft, he edged his way in a wide circuit through the underbrush until he was directly in the rear of his foe. Then, with the stealthy movements of a cat, he edged forward inch by inch.

There was an open space around the shell hole of about ten feet. Here Frank must take his chance of discovery.

He could see the back of his foeman now as he crouched low in the crater. Frank's muscles grew tense as he gathered himself together for a spring.

Once more the German rose, put his rifle to his shoulder and fired. Before the echo of the shot

had died away, Frank was on him like a panther.

With all the weight of his six feet of brawn and muscle he landed squarely on the shoulders of the Hun.

And here for a few seconds it may be well for the sake of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series to state something of the adventures of the Army Boys up to the time our story opens.

Frank Sheldon, who was the natural leader of the group, had been born and brought up in Camport, a thriving inland American town of about twenty-five thousand inhabitants. He was a vigorous, well-set-up young fellow, a leader in athletic sports, and universally popular.

Frank's father had died several years before, and the boy was the only child of his widowed mother, to whom he was devoted. She was of French birth, and, at the death of her parents, had inherited considerable property in France. Legal difficulties, however, had interfered with the settlement of the estate. She was preparing to go to France in person to straighten out matters, when the war broke out and made the trip impossible.

Frank had a responsible position in the firm of Moore & Thomas, a prosperous hardware concern in Camport. Among his close associates

were Bart Raymond, his special chum, and Tom Bradford, employed by the same firm.

Billy Waldon, a member of a National Guard regiment which had been down on the border during the Mexican trouble, was also a Camport lad, and a close friend of all three.

The boys all had the true American spirit, and when the war broke out were eager to enlist. This feeling was shared indeed by all their fellow employees except Nick Rabig, the surly, ill-conditioned foreman of the shipping department.

Though born in America, Nick was of German descent, and lost no opportunity of decrying this country and exploiting Germany. He was the bully of the place, and more than once he and Frank had nearly come to blows.

Frank had been wild to enlist from the start, but his widowed mother was naturally reluctant. An incident, however, when Frank knocked a German down and made him kiss the flag he had insulted, decided her.

Frank and Bart joined the old Thirty-Seventh, the Camport regiment of which Billy was already a member. Tom tried to join at the same time, but was rejected because of his teeth, much to his disgust.

Soon the regiment went into training at Camp Boone where later Tom and Rabig, both of

whom were drafted, joined them; finally embarked for France; narrowly escaped a submarine; at last reached the battle line. How Frank met a French Colonel Pavet, who had been a neighbor of his mother's family in Auvergne, and had promised his help in the recovery of her property; how Frank gave Rabig the thrashing he richly deserved; how the boys bagged a Zeppelin; how the regiment had its baptism of fire; and how Frank saved Colonel Pavet's life on the battlefield—all these and many other exciting incidents are narrated in the first volume of this series, entitled, "Army Boys in France or From Training Camp to Trenches."

The army boys were soon in the thick of the fighting and adventures crowded close one upon the other. They went too far in one of their attacks and were trapped in the cellar of a ruined house, where they overheard the discussion of important German army secrets in a room overhead.

When they ventured out at night they were pursued by Uhlan cavalry and forced to dive from a shattered bridge into the river. Swimming to the other side, they were taken prisoners by the Germans. An American airplane, sweeping down upon their captors, rescued the boys and took them back to the American lines.

These things and their exploits in the battles that followed are described in the second volume of the series, entitled, "Army Boys in the French Trenches or Hand-to-Hand Fights with the Enemy."

By this time the boys were no longer recruits, but veteran fighters, and all that they had learned was fully tested in the great German drive that followed.

The first impetus of that tremendous assault carried the Germans far. The Allies fell back, fighting doggedly and with splendid heroism, but it was not long before they counter-attacked, and the great German retreat began which was destined never to stop till the Huns laid down their arms in utter defeat.

During these events the army boys for the first time were separated, Tom having been taken prisoner. The story of his escape and his comrades' adventures together with the unmasking of Rabig as a traitor, give interest to the third volume of the series, entitled, "Army Boys on the Firing Line or Holding Back the German Drive."

And now to go back to Frank.

The rifle fell from the German's hands and he and the attacking American rolled together to the bottom of the shell hole. The next instant

Frank's sinewy hands had sought and gripped his opponent's throat.

The attack had been so sudden, the surprise so overpowering, that the struggle was of short duration. The German was a powerful man and, under other circumstances, would have given Frank all he could possibly do to handle him. As it was, he tried to fight back and reached for his knife, but the grip of those relentless hands never relaxed, and soon Frank felt the man's body go limp beneath him.

Then Frank loosed his hold and rose to his feet. Though still in a stooping position lest he should be seen by some other of his foes.

He must work quickly. The German's helmet had fallen off in the struggle. Frank clapped it on his own head, though he loathed the touch of it. To strip his fallen enemy of his clothing was the work of only a few moments, although to turn the inert form over and pull off the tunic gave him some trouble. But it was soon done, and when Frank picked up the rifle, he might have passed to a casual eye as one of the Kaiser's soldiers.

One other thing remained. The man was not dead, but unconscious. At any moment he might come to his senses and give the alarm. Frank knew perfectly well how the enemy would have

solved that problem had conditions been reversed. A bayonet thrust through the heart would have settled matters then and there. But Frank was an American, not a Hun, and he revolted at the thought of deliberately killing a defenceless enemy.

Taking off his belt, he fastened the man's hands behind him. Then he made a gag of his handkerchief and secured it firmly in the German's mouth. He would have tied his feet also, but he had neither time nor material. Something had to be left to chance.

It was unlikely that the German, bound and gagged and lying on his back, could do much harm even if he recovered consciousness before Frank had completed his work. Throwing the man's gun over the edge of the shell hole, Frank vaulted after it.

To the ordinary eye he looked what he purported to be—a German private; but how he hated that uniform. He rejoiced anyway that it did not come in personal contact with him, as his own uniform of khaki was under it.

Although now he need no longer hide, he knew that if captured he would have short shrift. With his own uniform he was a scout. In this disguise he would be regarded as a spy. It would be a tree, a rope, and a death by hanging, instead

of the soldier's death by shooting, to which, by constant exposure, he had become largely indifferent.

He shook off the thought, however, and set to work at once to play his part. He loaded the rifle, dropped to his knee behind the stump of a tree, and fired in the direction of the American camp, taking good care, however, that the shot should go through the tree tops. Then, as though seeking better shelter, or obeying some order given him, he ran from place to place, encircling the line as the corporal had directed.

Nobody noticed him, nobody questioned him. Had an officer addressed him, his chances would have been slim, for his knowledge of German was limited. As it was, he was only one of a multitude of grey-clad figures, moving about in loose formation, each man acting largely for himself, owing to the wooded condition of the fighting ground. They were taking advantage of every shell hole, every stump, every rock, every fallen tree.

Frank's heart sank when he saw how many there were. He figured that there were at least five hundred who had been told off to surround this little, lost battalion of Americans, to starve them, capture them, kill them, as the case might be.

Five hundred! And Frank knew that his squad of comrades under Wilson had dwindled to less than fifty. The odds were at least ten to one.

Nor did there seem to be any weak place in the line. If it had been open country, a wild, splendid dash, taking the enemy by surprise, might have a chance of cutting through, but in this dense forest, thick with trees and rank with underbrush, the Huns would have time to get together enough men to cover any point.

From place to place he edged his way until he had swung about the circle. They were ringed in with foes, that was beyond question. He knew now what he had been sent to find out—he must get back to camp as soon as possible and report.

It would never do, however, to approach the American position in that uniform. He worked his way as close as he dared toward the place where his comrades were, then, taking advantage of an especially heavy thicket, he slipped off the Hun garb, threw it from him in disgust, and once more, in the uniform he loved, crept along on hands and knees until, peering through the brush, he caught glimpses of his comrades.

They were taking advantage of every natural obstacle, and in addition had fortified their position by piling up logs in such a way as to make a fort of considerable strength.

Frank's heart thrilled as he thought of the little band, holding out desperately against foes who outnumbered them ten to one. He thought of the Alamo, where a handful of men with the same blood as these, had defied thousands for days, and had gone down at length, fighting to the last man. The glory of it! The magnificence of it! It made the blood race through his veins!

He gave a series of three shrill, sharp whistles, as had been agreed upon, and, rising to his feet, ran for the last few yards into the midst of his companions.

A cheer went up as they saw him and rapturous greetings were shouted to him. Billy and Bart were especially boisterous in their welcome, but, apart from a hurried grip of the hand as he passed, Frank had no time to stop for anything until he had made his report.

He made straight for the corporal, whose eyes lighted up with relief and satisfaction when he saw him.

"Thank Heaven you're back, Sheldon!" he exclaimed. "It was a forlorn hope, and I didn't think you had a chance."

"Oh, I guess the bullets know me," grinned Frank.

"How did you make out? What did you find?" queried the corporal eagerly.

"Nothing that you'll be glad to hear," replied Frank soberly.

"How many men did they seem to have?" asked the corporal.

"Five hundred at least, I should judge," said Frank. "And there doesn't seem to be a gap in the line anywhere."

CHAPTER III

THE FLAG OF TRUCE

CORPORAL WILSON pondered the news with a grave face.

"I see how it is," he said after a moment. "Their main force is bucking up against our army and they've left a few battalions here to mop us up."

"It's a wonder they haven't rushed us before this," said Frank. "They're easily ten to one."

"They would have done it long ago if they'd known how few we were. That's where we've got the bulge on them. They probably think we're two or three hundred at the least, and they don't dare to tackle us on that basis. They've already gained a wholesome respect for the Yankee fighting man."

"Do you think they will try to starve us out?"

"Likely as not," responded the corporal; "and they've got a mighty good chance to do it, too. Our boys didn't figure on anything like this when they started out this morning, and they haven't got more than one day's rations in their kits. We'll soon be out of water, too."

"The water's one thing we don't have to worry about," Frank assured him. "I found a little stream trickling through the gorge there that will give us all we need. That is, if the enemy doesn't discover it, too, and dam it up."

"Or poison it," supplemented the corporal bitterly. "Those skunks are capable of it. But how did you manage to find all this out in so short a time?" he asked with quickened interest. "I thought it would take you at least two or three hours and you are back in less than an hour."

"I didn't have to do much creeping," said Frank with a grin. "I was on my feet most of the time."

"Wasn't that taking big chances?" asked the corporal, in some surprise.

"Not with a German uniform on," laughed Frank.

"Oh, I see," said the corporal. "You found a dead Hun and stripped him."

"He was very much alive when I first saw him," returned Frank. "But when I left him he was lying on his back with his hands tied and a gag in his mouth."

The corporal's hand came down with a resounding thump on Frank's shoulder.

"Sheldon, you're a trump!" he exclaimed. "You're all wool and a yard wide! I didn't make

any mistake when I picked you out for that job. But now get your gun and pick your stump. There must be no let up in our fire. We've got to keep these Huns guessing."

Frank made his way back to the little thicket that the Camport boys had picked as cover.

The others greeted him with a shout as he picked up his rifle and dropped to the ground beside them.

"Bully old scout!" exclaimed Bart, extending his hand and gripping Frank's as if he would wrench it off.

"Back without a scratch," chuckled Billy.

"Glory hallelujah!" chortled Tom.

Questions came tumbling over each other thick and fast as they asked eagerly about the details of his adventure.

"An Indian's got nothing on you," chuckled Bart.

"Suppose a German officer had held you up?" hazarded Tom.

"Well, then there'd have been a dead Hun officer or a dead Yankee," replied Frank. "He'd have killed me or I'd have killed him. He'd have tumbled to me right away if I had tried to answer him. What I don't know of German would fill a book."

Suddenly there was a lull in the firing. The

chat-chatter of the enemy's machine guns ceased. The whining of the bullets no longer filled the air.

"Wonder if they're running short of ammunition," conjectured Bart.

"More likely they're getting ready for a rush," returned Frank.

The corporal seemed to be of the same opinion, for he hurried from point to point, exhorting his little force to stand ready for an attack. But the attack did not come.

Five, ten minutes passed in waiting. Then Frank's keen eyes peering through the trees caught sight of something white fluttering at the end of a rifle.

The bearer of the rifle could not be seen, and the weapon was extended at an angle from the shelter of a tree.

Frank hurried to his officer and told what he had seen.

"It may be a trick, sir," he said; "but I think they want to talk to us."

Wilson gave the command to his men not to fire. Then he shouted in a stentorian voice: "What do you want out there?"

"To talk," came back the answer in excellent English.

"Come forward, then," returned the corporal.

A grey clad figure slowly emerged from the

shelter of a tree, and, still holding the extemporized flag above his head, advanced toward the barricade.

But the corporal was not minded that the newcomer should discover by what light forces the little fort was held.

When the man was within fifty feet Wilson halted him.

"Stand where you are," he commanded. He turned to Frank, who was close beside him.

"You are in command here, Sheldon, till I get back," he said. "Have the men keep their rifles trained on this fellow, and at the least sign of treachery shoot him down. I'll go out and see what he wants."

"All right, sir," replied Frank.

Corporal Wilson climbed over the barricade and advanced to where the German emissary had halted. The latter wore the shoulder straps of a lieutenant.

He looked Wilson over superciliously as he advanced.

"Well," said the former, "what is it that you want?"

"Tell one of your officers that I want to see him," said the other, arrogantly.

"I am the officer in charge," replied Wilson.

The German stared.

"But you are only a corporal," he blurted out.

"I told you," said Wilson curtly, "that I am the officer in charge. Now tell me what you want, and withdraw."

"I come from my commander to summon you to surrender."

A slight smile of amusement played about Wilson's mouth.

"Why?" he asked.

"Why, why," stammered the officer, nonplussed by Wilson's bearing, "because you are surrounded. Because you are outnumbered. Because we can capture you when we will."

"Really?" replied Wilson. "Now that's interesting. Any other reason?"

The German officer stiffened.

"They are sufficient," he replied. "We wish to avoid useless slaughter."

"Slaughter of whom?" drawled Wilson. "Americans or Germans?"

The officer grew angry.

"You take the thing lightly," he said. "You Americans joke about matters of life and death. Do you not care for the lives of your men?"

"Yes," replied Wilson, dropping his careless tone. "I care for the lives of my men, but I care more for their honor. Those men back there don't know the meaning of surrender. If you want us you've got to take us."

"Donnerwetter!" growled the officer. "You speak boldly."

"You'll find us ready to back it up," said Wilson. "Take this answer back to your commander. We will never surrender. We'll fight to the last man. You'll never see a white flag raised by us. The Stars and Stripes are good enough for Americans."

In his earnestness he had raised his voice and his words rang back to the boys of the battalion, who had all been interested in the conference.

A great cheer went up, a cheer so hearty and resounding that it might have come from a regiment rather than a battalion.

"That's the stuff!" yelled Billy, forgetting for the moment the restraint of discipline.

The German officer saw that his errand was fruitless, and argued no longer.

"Very well," he said. "I'll take back your message. You have had your chance and—"

"And you've had your answer," replied Wilson.

They saluted and parted.

The corporal watched the messenger till the white flag disappeared from view, and then went back to his improvised fort, where he was received with acclamations.

The boys were ablaze with enthusiasm and would have hugged him if they had dared. Wil-

son had said for them all what was in their hearts. He had stood for the spirit that animated the whole American army. They knew how to die, but they did not know how to surrender.

CHAPTER IV

A MESSAGE FROM THE SKY

"Wasn't that great stuff?" murmured Frank to Bart, when the comrades resumed their places and were reloading their rifles.

"Straight from the shoulder," replied Bart enthusiastically.

"Hot off the bat," put in Billy.

"It took the fellow clean off his feet, grinned Tom.

"We're in for it," remarked Frank coolly, as he gripped his rifle. "They'll rush us now, and try to wipe us out."

"They'll find it pretty costly rushing if they try it," said Billy.

"That's right," agreed Tom. "If they were Indians and there were as many of them as there are now—"

"But these Heinies are no good in wood fighting," commented Bart. "They're all right out in the open when they can come in a mass and in a rush and where each one of them can feel that some other man is backing him up, but when it comes to man to man fighting we've got 'em."

"They won't like it, but they'll do it all the same," repeated Frank with conviction. "Their officers go on the theory that life is cheap when it's only the life of their men. That's one thing that's going to make the Germans lose this war. They have to fight in a bunch, or their men won't fight at all. That's what gives our guns a chance to mow them down. When the pinch comes at the last, they'll be short of reserves, and will wind the thing up in jig time."

Just then there came a crash of rifle fire that filled the woods with uproar and drowned out all other sound.

From every side the bullets came zipping, whizzing, whining, and above the crack of rifles, the besieged party could hear the deadly rattle of the machine guns, as they poured out their stream of leaden death.

Close to the ground the boys crouched while that blasting torrent swept over them. Had they been in the open, few or none of them would have survived; but the heavy trees proved their salvation.

Bullets thudded into the trunks, stripped off the bark, brought branches raining to the earth, but their shelter proved sufficient. There were some slight flesh wounds, but the little party escaped disaster.

Twice more at intervals of a few minutes each the deadly hail sought to overwhelm them. Then suddenly all firing ceased.

"They'll charge us now," muttered Bart. "They'll think they've wiped out part of us and got the rest buffaloed."

"Let them come," retored Bart. "The quicker they come the sooner they'll fall."

"We've had one bit of luck," put in Bart. "You'll notice they haven't any heavy guns. Bullets can kill, but they can't batter down this fort."

"They'll bring them up later, maybe," conjectured Frank. "But,—steady, fellows, here they come!"

On every side they saw between the trees the grey uniforms of the Boches coming on, not rapidly, for the trees prevented, but stealing from bush to bush, and from shelter to shelter, until they could get near enough for the final rush.

With eyes blazing, with fingers gripping their rifles, while they glanced along the sights, the little company of Americans waited.

Their corporal moved about among them, cool and alert, with words of caution and command.

"Steady, boys," he said, and his voice was calm and level. "Don't waste a bullet. When they rush give them a volley and pump lead into them as long as your ammunition lasts. Then club your rifles and show them the stuff you're made of."

They nodded, and the corporal knew, as he gazed with pride at their set faces, what the oncoming foe had in store for him.

Closer and closer the grey lines crept, but not a shot came from the American positions. Perhaps the enemy thought that their terrific fire had already crushed out all resistance.

Soon they were only a hundred yards distant, then eighty, then sixty. Then they paused.

"Now they're coming," breathed Frank.

"They're getting ready," agreed Bart.

"A lot of them won't go back," muttered Tom.

Then like a flood, firing as they came, the grey line surged forward.

"Fire!" shouted the corporal.

A stream of fire leaped from the American rifles. They tore through the charging masses, and the enemy went down in heaps. They were so close that every bullet found its mark.

There was a moment of confusion, but only a moment. Under the shouted commands of their officers, the bloody lanes were filled up.

Again the American rifles cracked, and again the enemy ranks were shattered. But now they had reached the breastworks of the little fort.

Some tore at the logs and tried to dislodge them. Others climbed over and jumped into the

enclosure. But all the time that deadly stream of bullets took its toll, until at last the German ranks showed signs of wavering and confusion.

The corporal seized that instant.

"Now!" he shouted. "Up, fellows, give them the bayonet!"

With a ringing cheer the American boys leaped to their feet and sprang forward. They fell on the Huns like so many wildcats. Their gun butts flung over their heads like flails. Nothing could stand before that avalanche of brawn and muscle, dash and daring.

The enemy fell back. Those who were already in the enclosure never got out. The army boys leaped over the breastworks and charged into the foe with the bayonet, plowing their way through, hacking, stabbing, clubbing, they drove the Boches before them.

Their enemies were brave enough in the mass, but they quailed before cold steel. Man to man, they were no match for the American boys when it came to bayonet work.

First there was hesitation, then a backward movement, then a retreat, slowly gathering speed.

Then came a stampede, and the enemy fled, leaving some score of silent forms upon the ground to tell of the way Americans fight.

The men, whose blood was up, would have followed, but the corporal's whistle recalled them.

"Enough for now, fellows," he said, trying to conceal the exultation in his tones. "We mustn't scatter. Back to your positions."

They obeyed reluctantly. They were like hounds unleashed, called off from their prey.

"Might have let us make a clean job of it," grumbled Tom, as he made his way back.

"You old glutton," said Billy, "how much fighting do you want before you call it a day's work?"

"Some lovely scrapping, fellows," grinned Frank, as he set to work to clean and reload his rifle.

"I guess that will hold them for a while," chuckled Bart. "They'll wait for heavy guns now before they tackle us again."

The corporal passed by just then and looked at them approvingly.

"Good work, men," he said. "I don't think they'll be coming back for more—for a while at least. In the meantime, you had better get out your kits and get something to eat. But go easy on the grub and piece it out, for nobody knows when we'll get any more."

The boys were not at all loath to obey this command, for now that the excitement of the fight was over they had become very conscious that they were hungry.

"I could eat nails," declared Bart.

"I've got a great big vacuum where my stomach ought to be," Frank added.

"This won't be a crumb," grumbled Tom disconsolately, as he looked at the scanty portion of bread and meat that for all he knew, was the only thing that stood between him and starvation.

"It isn't a Belshazzar feast," agreed Billy. "But it will keep life in us anyway till we get another hack at the Heinies."

They would have liked to clear away every scrap, but were mindful of the corporal's injunction and still had a morsel left to put back in their kits.

"Never mind," laughed Frank. "We'll fill up on water."

"It's easy enough to say," said Tom, "but where you going to get it?"

"I tumbled across a dinky little stream when I was out scouting," Frank replied. "There wasn't more than a thimbleful of water trickling through it, but I guess it will keep us going. Hand me over that water bottle and I'll try for some."

He slipped away in the direction of the gully, only to return in a few minutes with a look of chagrin on his features.

"You looked peeved," said Bart.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"Hand over the water," demanded Billy.

"Nothing doing," said Frank disgustedly, as he threw the empty water bottle on the ground. Fritz has blocked our game. It was only a little thread of water anyway, and they've dammed it up. All there is now is a little wet stone and sand.

"Hard luck," growled Tom.

"We're certainly up against it," murmured Bart.

"Never mind," said Billy cheerfully. "It may rain, and if it does, the Huns can't stop us from getting that."

"Not a cloud in the sky," muttered Tom, refusing to be consoled. Frank looked up through an opening in the trees.

"Yes there is," he said. "But no," he corrected himself. "That isn't a cloud—it's a plane! and it's right overhead."

They all followed the direction of his glance, and could make out an airplane, although it was at so great a height that it could scarcely be discerned.

"Maybe the Huns have sent a plane to drop on us," suggested Tom.

"That's all we need to make this a festive occasion," laughed Frank.

"I wish it would fly a little lower, so that we could see the tracings on it," remarked Bart.

"Shouldn't be surprised if it were one of our own fellows," suggested Billy, hopefully.

The plane kept sweeping around in great circles as though it were searching for something. Lower and lower it dropped in swooping spirals till Frank, whose eyes were keenest of all, gave a delighted exclamation.

"By the great horned spoon," he cried, "it is one of our fellows! I can see the United States marking on the wings."

"The Huns try that trick sometimes," said Tom doubtfully.

The boys followed the plane with fascinated interest.

"That fellow doesn't know how lucky he is," said Bart, enviously. "What would you give, fellows, to be up where he is now?"

"Remember the day Dick swooped down on us when we were being taken to the prison camp?" asked Frank. "Gee! wouldn't it be great if history should repeat itself?"

"Lightning never strikes twice in the same place," said Tom.

"Dry up, you old croaker," said Billy. "Look!" he suddenly exclaimed. "That fellow is letting something loose."

"Better duck," said Tom, crouching closer under the fallen tree he had chosen for cover. "Ten to one it's a bomb."

"Bomb nothing," said Frank. "I'd say at a guess it was a parachute."

"It's too little for that," said Bart.

"Looks more like a toy balloon," said Billy, straining his gaze at the hovering plane.

Something was dropping down toward them, not swiftly, but lightly, like a ball of thistledown. Lower and lower it came, until they saw that it was a tiny parachute with something fluttering at the end of it.

Still lower and—

"What in the name of all—" Bart was beginning when Frank gave a shout.

"It's a pigeon!" he cried. "By Jove, fellows, it's a carrier pigeon!"

"What do you think of that!" chortled Billy.

"What can it mean?" queried Bart, wonderingly.

"I know what it means!" shouted Frank jubilantly, his quick mind jumping at conclusions. "It means that Uncle Sam is on the job, and is taking care of the boys who fight his battles!"

CHAPTER V

THE FALLING PLANE

In what was really minutes, but seemed like hours, the little parachute with its fluttering burden reached the level of the tops of the trees.

"If it will only come through this open space," murmured Bart, fairly holding his breath.

"Not a chance," muttered Tom. "It will get caught in the top of one of those trees sure."

A little breeze caught the parachute just then, and confirmed his evil prophecy. It was blown into the top of a tall tree only a little way from where the boys were watching.

An exclamation of disappointment broke from all.

"Just one thing to do," cried Frank, and the next moment he was climbing the tree like a cat.

"Gee, that fellow does things while we're thinking about them!" cried Bart, as Frank reached the lower branches and swung himself into the tree.

"He sure is there with the speed stuff," echoed Tom, following Frank's progress with his eyes as

he made his way through the branches to where the bird was struggling to disentangle itself.

It required some caution on Frank's part as he neared the tiny creature, for the branches higher up were slender and bent ominously under his weight; but at last he reached the little messenger, closed his hand gently about him and unfastened the cord that bound him to the parachute.

He soothed and petted the bird for a moment, and then carefully made his way to the lowest branch from which he swung himself with one hand and dropped to the ground.

In an instant he was back among his comrades with his prize.

They crowded around him, stroking the bird, whose bright, intelligent eyes, used to their uniform, looked at them without any trace of fear.

"It's me to Wilson with this right away," Frank said. "Where did you see the corp. last?"

"He was over there by that rock, binding up Brown's hand," Bart informed him.

"Moving from cover to cover toward the spot indicated, he came upon the corporal, who had just completed his first aid bandaging.

"What have you there, Sheldon?" he asked in surprise, as he noticed the bulge in Frank's tunic.

"This," returned Frank, as he exhibited the bird to his officer's astonished gaze.

"A pigeon!" ejaculated Wilson, taking the bird from Frank's hand. "Where on earth did you get him?"

"Nowhere on *earth*. He came from the sky," grinned Frank, and went on to explain.

Wilson felt beneath the small messenger's wing and found a little bag of oiled silk. This he detached and opened. Within was a note traced on thin paper. He read it aloud.

" 'To officer in charge of Company B.

" 'This message, together with similar ones, is being dropped over the forest on the chance that it may come into your hands. Answer it at once. Tell us as nearly as possible where you are and what are the conditions. Fasten your message to this bird, and it will bring it direct to headquarters. Hold out. Help will come.

"(Signed) 'LEDYARD, Colonel.' "

Frank gave a whoop of joy, and Wilson only restrained himself from joining in with an effort. He tore a sheet from his order book, consulted his compass, and then wrote hastily, describing as nearly as he could possibly locate it the position of his little band.

"Short of ammunition, no food or water," he wrote, "but lots of fight left in our men. We've

just repelled an enemy attack. We'll hold on till you get to us."

He folded the note, enclosed it in the silk receptacle, and secured it firmly under the bird's left wing, stroking the bird's head gently as he did so.

"Got a few spare bread crumbs, Sheldon?" he asked. "We ought to feed this little soldier before we send him off."

Frank produced a bit of bread from his kit, crumbled it in his hand and held the crumbs there while the pigeon pecked at them till he was satisfied.

"Here's hoping that a stray bullet doesn't nip him," said the corporal as he tossed the pigeon into the air.

The bird rose to the top of the trees, circled about for a moment until he had made sure of his direction, then, like an arrow from a bow, he darted off.

They followed the feathered messenger with their eyes until he was lost to sight. Then they looked at each other.

"May luck go with him," invoked the corporal.

"Amen to that," echoed Frank, as he made his way back to his comrades.

"Did you see the little rascal vamoose?" he asked, as he dropped down beside them.

"Did we?" laughed Billy. "You bet we did!"

"It may mean all the difference between life and death to us," observed Bart, his eyes shining.

"If a Hun bullet doesn't get him on the way," put in pessimistic Tom.

" 'Twould have to be a pretty swift bullet to down that bird," said Billy.

"Just wait till the old Thirty-Seventh gets that message!" exulted Frank, his face one broad smile at the thought. "Maybe they won't come lickety-split and clean up this bunch of Huns!"

A feeling of elation and new life filled the hearts of the boys as they again sought their positions and picked up their rifles.

Now they knew that they were not abandoned. Uncle Sam was not leaving them in the lurch. Outside this tangled patch of woods the old Thirty-Seventh was thinking of them, planning for them, getting ready to help.

"Wonder how long it will take that bird to get there," conjectured Bart, as he felt in his cartridge belt and noted how few bullets he had remaining.

"Not long, I hope," replied Frank.

"He's almost there by this time," put in Billy.

"Those birds can fly about a mile a minute, and the old regiment can't be very far off."

"I hope Wilson tied that message on tight," said Tom uneasily. "It would be just our luck to have it lost. Then our cake would be dough for fair."

The afternoon wore on without any attempt on the part of the Germans to make a second rush upon the fort.

"Guess they got their fingers burnt too badly the first time," chuckled Billy. "They think that—"

Boom came the sound of a heavy gun. And a shell tore screaming through the trees above them.

The boys looked at each other.

"So that's what they've been waiting for," said Billy as he faced the new situation.

"They've got the bulge on us now for fair," mourned Tom. "As long as it was only rifle against rifle we had a chance, if it was ten to one."

"Now, now! go slow there, Tom," chided Frank. " 'One swallow doesn't make a summer,' and one gun doesn't make a battery."

"There's that plane again!" exclaimed Bart suddenly, as the whirr of a motor made itself heard overhead.

"The same one or its twin," agreed Billy, as they looked eagerly upward. "It's got exactly the same markings."

The great plane like a giant hawk circled about in ever descending spirals until it was almost near enough for them to see its occupant.

"I wonder if it's come in answer to the message," conjectured Bart, his eyes never leaving the plane.

"I guess likely," returned Frank. "It's two hours now since the bird left, and I bet it's been a busy two hours at headquarters."

"Look, he's dropping something!" exclaimed Billy quickly.

A dark object left the plane and fell swiftly toward the ground. It looked as if it were coming straight toward them and they sprang to their feet.

"Stand from under," ordered Frank.

"Scatter," cried Billy.

"If that ever hits us we're goners," cried Tom.

A big square box came crashing through the trees and struck the ground within twenty feet of them.

The boys rushed toward it and just then the corporal and a number of their comrades came running up.

The crash had broken the box and its contents were scattered upon the ground.

A cheer rose from the little company.

"Grub!" crowed Billy lustily, as he pounced upon a loaf of bread. "The Huns can't starve us out anyway."

Even Tom had a grin on his face as he viewed the tinned meats and bread and filled water bottles that had come down to them from the sky.

The corporal was giving orders for the gathering up and the storing of the supplies when suddenly an exclamation of alarm came from one of the soldiers standing near.

"Great Scott, they've hit the plane!" he cried.

All eyes followed his gaze.

The plane was evidently in trouble. One of the wings had been partly shot away. It looked like a ship on a troubled sea as the aviator made desperate efforts to get it under control.

It dived, rose, fell again, while the little company watched it with their hearts in their mouths.

For a few minutes it seemed as though the aviator might triumph, but the wound to the great air bird was mortal. Down it came, at first slowly, and then with accelerated speed. Down, down, still faster, toward the earth that seemed to beckon it to its doom.

CHAPTER VI

THE BUGLE CALL

A CRY of horror rose from the company that stood looking helplessly on.

"He'll be killed!" muttered Bart huskily.

"It looks like it," agreed Frank sadly.

"You never can tell," said Billy hopefully. "The trees may save him."

"Too much to hope for," muttered Tom between his clenched teeth.

With a crash of splintering wood and tearing canvas the plane struck a group of trees about a hundred feet from where the Army Boys were standing. The heavy motor tore itself loose and buried itself deep in the ground.

The aviator, wrenched from his seat, his straps broken by the shock, clutched desperately at the branches, but, although they broke the force of his fall, he was unable to retain his hold. He fell into a mass of tangled undergrowth.

There was a wild rush by the men of Company B toward the fallen aviator. At the same moment a volley of shots came from the space beyond and a body of grey clad troops came

charging toward its prey. Either they wanted to complete their work with the aeroplane or, which was more likely still, thought that they would catch the Americans off their guard while watching the plane.

"Down, men!" ordered the corporal, and the men dropped to their knees.

"Fire!" came the command, and a sheet of flame leapt from their rifles.

Some of the enemy went down, and there was a moment of hesitation in their ranks. The corporal seized this instant.

"Charge!" he shouted. "Give them the bayonet!"

In a flash the Americans were on their feet and went to their work with a rush.

The sharp, hard fight that followed was of short duration. Here as before the Germans proved that, man to man at bayonet work, they were no match for the Yankee boys. They could not stand cold steel.

The Americans tore into them with a gameness and determination that would not be denied. In a few minutes the fight was over. What was left of the enemy went back faster than it came.

Wilson disposed his men so as to guard against any renewal of the attack. Then he turned to Frank, who had been in the thickest of the fight.

"Take a few of the men, Sheldon," he ordered, "and look after that aviator of ours. I'm afraid that he's dead, but we'll hope he isn't. Get him out of those bushes as soon as you can."

Frank needed no second admonition. He picked out Bart, Billy and Tom, and together they raced toward the point where the aviator lay. They tore the underbrush apart, lifted him gently, and carried him into a little cleared space. His face was scratched and bleeding, his eyes were closed, but to their intense relief as they lifted him he uttered a groan.

"He's alive anyway," shouted Frank, delightedly.

"Glory hallelujah!" ejaculated Bart.

"Get me a water bottle," cried Billy to Tom.

Tom raced off, and in a moment was back with the precious water. They dashed it in the aviator's face and loosened the collar of his jacket. Frank ran his hands over the man's body, and was delighted to find that as far as he could see no bones were broken.

A minute or two of vigorous chafing and rubbing followed, and then the fallen man slowly opened his eyes.

"By the great horned spoon!" cried Frank, "if it isn't Dick Lever."

"Sure as guns!" ejaculated Bart.

"Good old Dick!" Billy exulted.

"They can't kill the old scout!" cried Tom delightedly.

Dick gazed up at them dazedly for a few seconds, and then the light of recognition dawned in his eyes.

He tried to sit up, but they restrained him.

"Take your time, old man," adjured Frank. "You've had a bad tumble and you're pretty well shaken up."

"The Huns came near getting you that time," said Bart. "Gee, but you've got as many lives as a cat!"

"All in the game," grinned Dick. "But I certainly did think it was all up with me this time. I don't know yet whether I've got any broken bones or not."

"Nothing like that, old man," Frank assured him. "I've just been looking you over, and you're as right as a trivet."

"That's bully," said Dick with a sigh of relief. "I surely would hate to think I couldn't fly any more. I've got my mark set for downing fifty planes, and I've only done for twenty so far."

At that moment Wilson came up.

"How's the patient?" he asked with a smile.

"Fine and dandy." Dick replied for himself.

"I'm worth a dozen dead men yet. I'm a little shaken up, that's all."

"It's a miracle you weren't killed," replied the officer. "I thought it was all over with you when I saw your plane come whirling down. It's lucky you struck those trees."

"It's luckier still," said Frank, "that we were able to drive back the Jerries when they tried to get him."

"So you had a rumpus with the Heinies!" said Dick, grinning. "They'd have liked nothing better than to have got me. They've had it in for little 'yours truly' for a long while."

"Especially since that day you picked us up on the road and scattered the guard with your machine-gun fire," grinned Dick. "I don't wonder they're feeling sore."

"Let's get him in a more comfortable position," said the corporal. "Here, boys, spread out those blankets and prop him up against the tree."

"Oh, I'm all right," protested Dick, stoutly. "I don't need to be coddled."

He tried to rise as he spoke, but his head swam and they gently forced him back.

"Take your time, old boy," counseled Frank. "You've done a good day's work already, and it's your time to rest."

"Well, now," suggested Wilson after they had

got Dick in a comfortable position, "tell us about headquarters. Did they get our message?"

"The pigeon got there all right," replied Dick, "and it wasn't ten minutes after they'd read that message before they got the grub together and sent in a hurry call for me to get busy. They've been awfully worried about this bunch. They didn't know whether you'd been wiped out or whether you'd been trapped somewhere."

"How was it that you were able to locate us in the first place when you dropped the pigeon?" asked Wilson.

"I didn't," explained Dick. "It was just a bit of luck. I dropped a dozen pigeons to-day, each with the same message, just on the chance that one of them might get to you. It was a forlorn hope; but as you see, it won out."

"What's the old Thirty-Seventh doing, anyhow?" Wilson continued his questioning.

"Fighting against odds," Dick replied. "The Prussian guards are there in force, and they have some crack Jaeger troops on our flank. It rather caught us off our stride at first, but the boys have got their second wind by now, and they're pushing the enemy back."

"You bet they are," chimed in Frank. "Good old Thirty-Seventh!"

"The colonel sent something else besides grub,"

resumed Dick. "He wrote a note that I was going to drop to you when that Hun archie got me. "Here it is," and he reached into the pocket of his jacket and took a note weighted by a bullet.

Wilson tore it open and hastily glanced over the lines it contained. It was brief but cheering.

"Good work," it said. "Hold on. Am sending food. We're coming to get you."

"Short and sweet," commented the corporal. "I knew they would not forget us. Now, men," he commanded, "two of you bring that food in and the rest of you get to your places. Those fellows may rush us again any time."

"Give me a gun," cried Dick. "Or better yet," he said as a thought struck him, "get that machine gun out of the plane, if it isn't too much knocked up. That ought to be worth fifty rifles if it's still in working order."

The gun, like the motor, had been wrenched from the plane by the violence of the fall. Some of the men hurried to it, and to their unbounded delight found it in good shape.

"Bully!" Dick exulted, as they brought it near him. "Now we'll have a little surprise party for the Boches when they try it again."

"I don't know but what they've got enough for

to-day," considered Frank, as he glanced toward the sun which was sinking in the west.

"Don't kid yourself," counseled Bart. "They know they've got ten times as many men as we have and our dear enemy fight well under those conditions."

"Yes," said Tom, scornfully, "they're like wolves in that. They're no good unless there's a pack of them. You never heard of a single wolf tackling anybody. The Huns are all right when they fight shoulder to shoulder, but put them man to man and bayonet to bayonet and they turn yellow."

"And that's just why we're going to lick 'em out of their boots," crowed Billy.

Bart's prediction was verified at dusk. Once more the enemy advanced, preceded by a withering rifle fire that would have cleared the wood of every living thing had it not been for the shelter afforded by the trees.

This time the attack was more vigorous than the two that had preceded them. The Germans had seen the plane and suspected its errand. They were intent on wiping out the little band before help could reach it.

Their front line melted away before the deadly hail that poured from the Yankee rifles, seconded by the stream of bullets from Dick's ma-

chine gun that tore great openings in their ranks.

The enemy went down till the ground in front of the barricade was carpeted with dead, but they re-formed and came on again and again.

At one point a number forced themselves over the barrier of logs and there was a fierce hand-to-hand fight before they were driven out. But driven out they were, for Yankee blood was up, and Yankee teeth were clenched, and Yankee wills decreed a victory.

The whistle blew for their recall, and the foe suddenly retreated, carrying away their wounded. For that night at least the fighting was over.

But if the enemy had suffered a bitter defeat, the defenders too had suffered heavily. Wilson's face was sober as he took account of losses. His little band of fifty now numbered barely thirty-five. Some had been killed outright, others were more or less severely wounded and put out of action. A few more attacks like this, and his little band would be wiped out entirely.

It was a busy hour that followed, burying the dead and giving what care to the wounded their scanty means afforded. Then, after the watch was set, the diminished company gathered into little knots to eat the rations served out to them before they turned in for the night.

The survivers were tired, exhausted by those

hours of fierce fighting, and saddened by the loss of so many of their comrades, but their spirit was as dauntless as ever, and not one of them thought of surrender. Not one of them regretted the defiance that their leader had hurled at the bearer of the flag of truce. They were Americans to the core.

"That last scrap was certainly something fierce," said Frank, as he threw himself down beside his comrades and reached for his share of the rations. "The Heinies hated to give it up."

"They hung on like leeches," agreed Bart, between mouthfuls. "It was nip and tuck that time when they got over the barricade."

"Well, the fellows that got over didn't get back," commented Tom. "I tell you what, Dick, that machine gun of yours helped us a lot."

"It was so hot when I got through that I couldn't have handled it much longer," said Dick.

"We're running pretty short of ammunition," Tom remarked, as he felt for his cartridge belt. "I haven't many rounds left, and I guess you fellows are as bad off as I am."

"Well, when the bullets are gone we'll have to give them the butts and the points," said Frank cheerfully. "And that's what Fritz likes least of all. But we won't cross that bridge till we come to it."

They had barely finished their meal when the order came to turn in for the night, and they were only too glad to obey. Each one of them knew that it was, very possibly, the last any one of them would ever have, but this did not prevent their falling to sleep almost at once.

Soon, with the exception of the sentries on guard against a night attack, the little camp was wrapped in slumber.

They were aroused at dawn by Corporal Wilson, who, despite his weariness, had been so weighed upon by his heavy responsibility, that he had not closed his eyes.

A hasty breakfast was dispatched, the little remaining ammunition was doled out, and the men stood ready for whatever might come.

That an attack would come they knew. That it would come soon they suspected, for experience had taught them that the foe usually attacked shortly after dawn.

"They'll give us a volley now almost any minute," muttered Tom.

But instead of the rattle of rifle fire there came the crash of artillery. Heavy shot and shell tore through the woods with a roar like thunder.

For the most part the shells had exploded beyond them. The enemy had not yet gotten the range. The boys looked at each other. They

knew what this portended. Against rifle fire their barricade sufficed as a stout protection, but they knew that when heavy guns were brought into action it was only a matter of time before their fortifications would be reduced to splinters.

With an instinctive movement the Army Boys reached out their hands and grasped those of their comrades.

"They've got hold of a battery somewhere," said Frank. "And now they figure they can batter down our logs and make a quick job of it."

Again came that tremendous roar and again that torrent of death searched out the wood.

This time their aim was truer, and a great breach was torn in the barricade while the logs were hurled in all directions.

For fully ten minutes this was repeated, and by this time the barricade was in ruins. Then came an ominous pause.

The little band of defenders knew what that meant, and they gripped their rifles tighter. The enemy was getting ready to charge.

Even then, a white flag run up, a white handkerchief waved at the end of a musket butt would have saved their lives, but that thought did not even suggest itself to the young Americans.

"They're coming now," muttered Tom, as through the woods a grey mass could be seen ad-

vancing. Nearer and nearer it came, silent, ominous, relentless, threatening doom.

Suddenly the deadly silence was pierced by one clear note, high, sustained, and thrilling; the note of a bugler, calling to the charge. Then a wild cheer, swelling to a roar, and through the woods behind them came tearing the old Thirty-Seventh, with leveled bayonets, and fell like a thunderbolt upon the foe!

CHAPTER VII

AN OLD FRIEND REAPPEARS

THERE was a moment of stupefaction for the little company, but only a moment. This vanished in wild delight as they sprang to their feet and joined in the surging tide that was rushing through the woods to overwhelm the foe.

A moment before they had been gazing into the eyes of death. Now, they were being swept along in the full current of life and triumph.

There was little resistance to be overcome. A scattering volley of rifle shots, and then the enemy broke and ran.

"Running like hares," panted Frank, as he pressed forward in the van.

"They won't get away though," gasped Bart, who was panting along at his side. "Listen! They're shouting *'kamerad'* already."

"No fighting to the last ditch for them," chortled Billy, as his eyes fell on the scattered groups that had thrown down their weapons and were holding up their hands in token of surrender.

The fighting was soon over, although the

"mopping up" process took half an hour or more, before the prisoners were herded together, preparatory to being sent to the rear.

Then for the first time the Army Boys could take a long breath and mingle with their rejoicing comrades, who mauled and pounded them in huge delight, for they were great favorites with the other men of their regiment.

"Thought Fritz had got you sure when you didn't turn up yesterday," said Fred Anderson, as he gave Frank a resounding thump on his back.

"They came mighty near it all right," responded Frank. "We were already booked to go West when you fellows came on the scene."

"Not a minute too soon you came," chimed in Tom. "Our ammunition was about gone and the Huns were ten times as many as we were."

"Something like Custer's last charge, was it?" grinned Milt Barlow. "I tell you what, we quickened our pace when we heard those heavy guns. We knew you didn't have any, and we felt pretty sure the Huns were laying down a barrage and getting ready to eat up what few of you might be left."

"They might have gobbled us up all right, but they'd find us mighty tough chewing," laughed Billy.

The colonel and the other officers had in the meantime been in conference with Wilson. After he had made his report the colonel said:

"You have done well, Corporal, extremely well. I'm proud to have you under my command. I will recommend you for promotion."

The corporal saluted.

"Thank you, sir," he replied. "But I couldn't have held out at all if it hadn't been for the courage of the men under me. They fought like tigers. You ought to have heard how they cheered when I told that officer we would never surrender."

The colonel's eyes lighted with pride.

"Young gamecocks!" he exclaimed. "And the whole regiment is made of the same stuff. If we don't get to Berlin it will be because our shoes give out. And even then," he continued with twinkling eyes, "those boys would go there barefoot."

There was a laugh among the officers who surrounded him, and then they scattered for their several commands to get the regiment into marching trim.

First, however, there was a stop for mess.

"My, but maybe this doesn't taste good!" said Frank as he ate the steaming meal that he had just received from the mess kitchen.

"You bet it does!" agreed Bart emphatically, as he drank a second cup of coffee so fast that it almost choked him.

"An hour ago I didn't think I'd ever need a square meal again," put in Billy in a muffled voice, his mouth being full. "Look at Tom there packing away the eats. The only thing I envy that fellow is his appetite."

Tom disdained to answer, but continued to eat as though he did not expect to have another meal for a month.

All too soon assembly sounded, and the men formed in line.

"Funny," said Tom as he rose reluctantly "how 'circumstances alter cases.' An hour ago that bugle sounded the sweetest music I ever heard. It doesn't sound half so good when it calls us from grub."

In the thick woods there naturally could be no marching order, so the different companies swung along in loose formation.

"How have things been with the old Thirty-Seventh?" asked Frank of Fred Anderson, who was marching beside him. "From what Lever has told us I understand you have had your hands full."

"It's been hot fighting sure enough," responded Fred. "If it hadn't, we'd have been after you be-

fore now. It was a toss up all day yesterday, and the Huns put up a better scrap than I thought was in them; but on toward night we got some new divisions into action and the enemy broke. I understand that now they're in full retreat."

"Good work!" exclaimed Frank. "Let's hope they keep it up till they reach the Rhine."

In about an hour the woods began to thin out and the regiment emerged into open country. On all sides, as far as the eye could reach, the roads were black with marching men.

In the center were a number of American divisions, to one of which the Thirty-Seventh attached themselves. On the right were the British in uniforms very similar to the Americans' own, while on the left were deep ranks in the cornflower blue of the French.

Artillery units rumbled along the road; here and there commands were halted to let squadrons of cavalry pass by. It was a veritable sea of men, yet moving ahead with precision, and in conformity with an ordered plan.

Frank drew a long breath and his heart pounded at the sight, for these were the hosts of freedom, champions of democracy, all moving forward with one end in view, to crush into the dust the hateful Thing that sought to shame and debase the manhood of the world.

"Something worth looking at," commented Bart at his shoulder, as his eyes took in the stirring sight.

"Yes," said Frank, fervently. "And they're all moving in the right direction, toward the Rhine."

"And they won't stop till they get there," chimed in Billy.

"They'll get there all right," echoed Tom, "but perhaps it may take longer than you fellows think. There's a lot of stiff fighting left in the Heinies yet. It may be two or three years before they're ready to quit."

"Come off, you old calamity howler," chided Billy. "We'll have the whole German nation howling *'kamerad'* before Christmas."

"That will be going some," said Bart, a little doubtfully. "It's August now, and that's only giving them four months before they crack. Germany's been building that great military machine for forty years, and it doesn't seem possible it could go to pieces as soon as that."

"I don't know but what Billy's right," said Frank. "Of course one guess is as good as another, but I shouldn't be surprised to see the machine go to pieces all at once, like the deacon's one horse shay. The Germans are all right when they're winning, but I tell you they can't stand defeat."

"Well," said Bart, without conviction, "I hope you fellows are right, but the only thing that we're sure of now is that we've got them on the run."

At noon the regiment halted for mess.

Frank's company was stationed near the division headquarters, and a constant stream of orderlies and officers from the various divisions were passing back and forth.

"You've got to hand it to the Frenchmen for knowing how to ride," remarked Tom, as an officer and his orderly came cantering by on horseback.

"Yes," agreed Frank, as he looked up. "The horse and man seem—Why," he broke off in surprise, "it's colonel Pavet himself."

Perhaps overhearing his own name, the officer looked in Frank's direction and halted on the instant. He dismounted and threw the reins to his orderly. Frank was already hurrying to meet him.

"Colonel Pavet," he said as he saluted.

"The same, *mon ami*," responded the colonel. "And more pleased than I can tell to see you again. In fact, my errand to headquarters to-day was to learn if I could get in touch with you."

"I am glad that you have done that with so little trouble," smiled Frank.

"It is in regard to your mother's property," continued the colonel. "I have good news for you."

"Good news?" repeated Frank, as he thought of his mother who had waited so long to come into her right.

"Yes," affirmed the colonel. "My brother Andre wrote me that he has at last straightened affairs. The case is not concluded, as there are still some formalities left to be gone through with, but he has gone so far that a certain trust fund that formed part of the property has been released and put at your mother's disposal."

"Then can I send her some money soon?" asked Frank, eagerly, for he knew how much comfort it would bring to the modest little home in Camport.

"At once, if you choose," said the colonel, smiling at his eagerness. "Andre has sent me an installment of five thousand francs to give to you, and I have it in my pocket at this moment."

CHAPTER VIII

THE THOUSAND FRANC NOTES

THE colonel tapped his pocket as he spoke and looked around him, conscious of the curious eyes that were fastened upon him.

"Perhaps we had better continue this conversation somewhere else," he said. "Come with me to headquarters here."

Frank gladly followed him into the rambling old château which had been partly destroyed by the enemy in their hasty flight but still had one wing intact that served as temporary headquarters for the staff. The colonel drew Frank into the broad embrasure of the window that gave them a little semblance of privacy.

"You told me some months ago that you were going to write to your mother and get authority from her to handle her money matters in France," the colonel said with a touch of inquiry in his voice.

"Yes," Frank replied, "I did, and she sent me this." He drew from his pocket a legal looking document which his mother had had drawn up for him in Camport.

The colonel took it and glanced it over hastily.

"That is all right," he said, approvingly. "Now if you will give me a receipt that I may send it to Andre, I will turn over the money to you. Andre sent it to me, as he thought I could find you more quickly and certainly than any letter he might send to you."

He took a long, flat wallet from his pocket and extracted five crisp notes and handed them to Frank. The latter glanced at them and saw that they were for a thousand francs each.

"Just a little earnest of what is to come later when the estate is fully in her possession," said the colonel, with a pleased smile.

"I can't thank you enough, Colonel," Frank replied, as he handed over a receipt which he had dashed off on a page of his note book and put the money carefully into his pocket. "I know how grateful my mother will be when she receives this money. It is wonderfully good of you to have taken so much trouble on our behalf."

"It is nothing at all," said the colonel, with a gracious wave of the hand. "I count myself fortunate in having been of even slight service to the daughter of one of my oldest friends."

"And now tell me about yourself," he said, changing the subject to avoid any other expressions of thanks. "Had your fill of fighting yet?

A needless question though, for you Americans never seem to have enough."

"Oh, we keep pounding away at the Boches," said Frank, modestly.

"And to such purpose," cried the colonel, his eyes kindling. "What magnificent fighting your troops have been doing, *mon ami.* It is superb! It is glorious! How your men held the enemy at Château Thierry, and threw them back across the Meuse! I tell you, *mon ami,* it was that that saved Paris. It saved France. It saved the world!"

There was no mistaking the colonel's sincerity, as his words tumbled over each other with true French enthusiasm.

"You are too generous, Colonel," said Frank deprecatingly, although his own heart swelled with pride. "If our men fought well, it was your countrymen who set us the example."

"You needed no example," replied the colonel. "It was the deathless spirit, the love of liberty in yourselves that urged you on. You have made France your eternal debtor."

"We were only paying back a debt that we had owed for a hundred years," said Frank. "When Pershing laid the wreath of laurel on Lafayette's tomb and said, 'Lafayette, we are here,' he expressed the gratitude that all Americans felt."

"Well, have it so if you will," said the colonel

with a smile. "There is glory enough for all. But now I must rejoin my regiment," he said, consulting his wrist watch. "I'm glad that the French and Americans are fighting side by side. Perhaps I yet may have the chance to save your life in battle as you once saved mine. My compliments to your mother when you write. *Au revoir.*"

He started to go out, but checked himself.

"Just a word of warning, *mon ami,*" he said. "If I were you I wouldn't let it be known to any one that you have this amount of money with you. It might, perhaps, be wise to entrust it to the regimental paymaster, or, if you can get leave for a day or two, you might go to one of the towns outside the battle zone and put it in the bank for the present."

"I had thought of sending it to my mother at once," said Frank; "or at the earliest opportunity."

"Better yet, better yet," murmured the colonel approvingly. "But until that opportunity comes, reveal to no one that you have the money with you."

"Certainly not," promised Frank, though with some inward reluctance, for he had already counted on sharing the knowledge of his good fortune with his friends.

The colonel passed out of the building, took the reins from his orderly, mounted, and with a last wave of the hand, rode away.

Frank sought out his comrades.

"Still hobnobbing with the swells," grinned Tom as he approached.

"He's been telling the colonel how to win the war," chaffed Billy.

Frank smiled in a preoccupied way.

"He wanted to speak to me about my mother's property," he said. "He has been so interested in straightening things out."

"How are things going?" asked Bart.

"Fine and dandy," Frank replied.

"Bully," cried Bart, and just then the order for the regiment to fall into line put an end to the questioning.

Frank swung along with the rest, but his movements were mechanical, and he walked as one in a dream. He was thankful that on that afternoon there was little actual fighting. The enemy was retreating rapidly to positions far in the rear, and there was little attempt at that time to check their pursuers. Frank was free to let his thoughts go far afield, away from the battle, away from France, across the seas to that little home in Camport where his mother was waiting and praying for him.

With what delight he would that night pen the letter that would tell her, first that he was still safe, and second that her rights had been established and her future made secure.

He could hardly wait for the march to end so that he could share his secret with the one he loved best in all the world.

It was a real grief to him that he could not tell it to his comrades who trudged along at his side. Good old Bart and Billy and Tom, they had been his confidants in everything up to this time, and as Billy expressed it, had been rooting for him to come out on top in this battle for his mother's rights.

To Tom he felt a special obligation in this matter, because it was he who, during their captivity in the German prison camp, had secured the butler's confession which had gone so far in straightening out the legal tangle. His own pleasure would have been doubled, trebled, if he could have shared it with these tried and trusted chums. He knew how heartfelt would have been their rejoicing.

But Frank had promised, and with him a promise was a sacred thing.

His comrades noticed his absorption and joked him about it.

"Frank's turning quaker," gibed Tom. "He hasn't spoken a word for the last hour."

"That confab with the colonel was too much for him," grinned Billy. "Why should he talk to common soldiers like us? We haven't got any shoulder straps."

"Come out of the clouds, old man," counseled Bart. "You'll be bumping your head against an airplane next thing you know."

"No need of my talking, when you fellows can chin enough for a regiment," parried Frank.

As soon as tents were pitched and mess was over he wrote a long, loving letter to his mother and then turned in beside his comrades who were already sound asleep.

All that night his dreams were haunted by floating bits of paper which, when he had captured and unrolled them, proved to be bank notes of a thousand francs each.

CHAPTER IX

AN ALL-AMERICAN ARMY

A WEEK passed away before Frank could find an opportunity of getting leave for a day or two so that he could send the money to his mother. The delay fretted him for two reasons. He was eager that his mother should have the money at the earliest moment possible, and he was afraid, too, that in the chances of battle he might lose it.

He might be taken prisoner, and in that case the money would be confiscated at once. Or he might be wounded or killed. But though he chafed at waiting, he did not want to ask for leave while the fighting continued, and for several days the fighting had been hot and constant.

The enemy was retreating, but retreating slowly and fighting obstinately. Strong rear guards were left behind, and hundreds of machine guns, cunningly posted and ably served, had to be cleaned out before the pursuit could be resumed.

"Those fellows are holding out like grim death," remarked Frank one afternoon, as, after an especially bitter fight, his company was bringing some prisoners to the rear.

"Yes," said Billy. "But they won't keep it up much longer. It's like the last flurry of a wounded whale, he's got the harpoon, but he kicks up a big rumpus before he turns over."

"I don't care much for this rear guard fighting, anyway," remarked Frank. "I'd like to see the whole German army stand up and fight so that we could get a quick decision. And I think we're going to get into that kind of a fight before long," he went on.

"Have you heard anything?" asked Billy, with quickened interest. "Give us the tip."

"Nothing at all certain," replied Frank; "but the colonel was talking with Major Melville yesterday and I overheard something of what they said. I didn't get it all, but it was something about our regiment being taken out of this and sent down to the Lorraine sector to be part of an All-American army."

"What?" cried Bart.

"Bully!" exulted Billy.

"It's about time that happened," chimed in Tom.

"Yes," Frank agreed. "It will be all to the good; that is, if it's true. It's all right, this fighting with the French and British. They're bully good fighters and dandy fellows, but after all, we'll enjoy it a mighty sight more when we Ameri-

cans are all together with just the Stars and Stripes over us and Pershing leading us on."

"You've said it!" fairly yelled Billy. "It's what I've been hoping for all along. I wonder they haven't done it before this."

"Well," said Frank, "I suppose it's been necessary at first to be brigaded with the British and French. They'd been fighting for three years before we started in. They've gotten next to all the cute little tricks that Heinie had up his sleeve, and they could pass it on to us. But now we've got it and we're ready to go it alone."

"It needn't have taken as long as this," grumbled Tom, unconvinced. "We could have taken the Hun's measure right from the kick-off."

"As far as fighting goes, we could," agreed Bart. "The boys were there with the stuff right from the start, but the officers had to get a little experience."

"What was the matter with West Point?" objected Tom. "No better training in the world than our officers get there."

"Sure thing," admitted Frank, "as far as theory goes. But theory is a mighty different thing from practice. And there have been so many new wrinkles developed in this war—tanks, poison gas, flame throwers, and all that sort of stuff that had never been heard of before—that

the only way to get next to it all was by actual experience in the field. But we've had that now, and we've learned all that the British and French can teach us."

"We certainly have!" said Bart, enthusiastically. "Do you remember the work our officers did at Cantigny? There hasn't been a more workmanlike job in this whole war."

"And look at the way they did at Vaux!" cried Frank. "Cleared the whole place up in forty minutes by the clock. That's going, if you ask me."

"Right you are," said Bart. "Oh, our officers are there with the grey matter all right; and, not throwing any bouquets at ourselves, we know what the boys in the ranks can do."

"If we're going to join Pershing's army, we'll have a pretty tough job to tackle right at the send off," said Frank. "The Huns have held that sector for four years, and they think they have a strangle hold on it."

"Just let us get hold of them, and we won't do a thing to them," crowed Billy.

"It will be a whooping big army that Pershing will have," commented Frank. "I heard the colonel say that we were going to have five army corps there."

"That listens good," said Bart. "Let's see, how many are there in an army corps?"

"Oh, about from two hundred and twenty-five thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand," replied Frank.

Tom gave a long whistle.

"Jiminy!" he cried. "Five times that! Over a million! Say, when that bunch of doughboys gets going, it will be all up with Fritz."

Their arrival at the prison camp with their captives gave them something else to think of and the subject was dropped, but the next morning Billy hunted up his comrades in great excitement.

"Frank's tip was right," he cried, and he turned a hand spring in his jubilation. "We're going down to be a part of Pershing's First Army."

"How do you know?" they asked, with one voice.

"I got it from one of the major's orderlies," Billy explained. "He says the thing is to be pulled off this morning. A French division is coming up to take our place, and then we'll hike it out of this place and start for the Lorraine sector."

There was a chorus of delighted exclamations.

"Say, that's great news!" cried Frank.

"Best thing I've heard since I came to France!" ejaculated Bart.

"Now the Huns are going to find what they're up against," prophesied Tom.

Billy's information proved correct, for, shortly

after mess, the division to which the former Thirty-Seventh belonged was drawn up in line, and the officers read to them the order of the day which stated that the division would immediately proceed to join the American first army in Lorraine, and there await further orders.

The message ran along the lines like an electric shock, and the men would have cheered if it had not been contrary to discipline. It was easy to see what delight the news gave them.

They had chafed at being under the orders of any but American commanders, but they had realized that this was necessary and had done their part loyally and valiantly. In their secret hearts they had longed to fight only as Americans, only under American leaders, only with the Stars and Stripes floating over them.

A little later the order came to march, the band broke into a national strain, and they were off.

"Now," said Frank, as he drew a long breath, "just listen to the eagle scream!"

CHAPTER X

THE HAND OF THE HUN

THE columns swung along in high spirits. For the first mile or so the going was easy. They were traveling a section from which the enemy had been forced to retreat in such a hurry that they had had no time to mine or destroy the roads. Before long they reached a devastated section where the roads were so torn by shell fire and blown up by mines that it was impossible for the men to keep in line.

At places there were holes twenty feet deep. At other spots great masses of rock and debris filled the roads from end to end. In addition to this all sorts of fiendish contrivances had been left behind in order to trap unwary pursuers.

At one point at the side of the road an abandoned motor lorry was half-sunken in a shell hole. Upon it was scrawled in chalk: "Supposed to be mined. Do not touch."

At another place they came across the body of a dead German soldier lying in a ditch.

"Seems to me that fellow ought to be buried, even if his own people didn't take time to do it,"

remarked Billy, as he looked with some pity on the crumpled figure. "It doesn't seem decent to leave him lying there."

"Not on your life!" returned Bart. "Ten to one the Huns have fastened electric wires to him someway, and the minute you touched the body you would be blown into kingdom come."

"Isn't there anything sacred to those fiends?" snorted Tom, indignantly.

"Not a thing," replied Frank. "They debase everything they touch. They desecrate cemeteries, they defile altars. Just look at that church over there," he pointed to the gaunt and shattered walls of what had been a beautiful church. The tower had been shot down, the roof had been destroyed, the costly stained glass windows shattered and the interior was a mass of mortar and debris.

"And that's only one of a hundred of similar wrecks that they've left in France," said Bart, bitterly. "Look what they've done to the beautiful cathedral at Rheims, the cathedral of Arras, and scores of others. They've tried to rob the world of beauty as well as liberty."

A little further on they came to a great orchard. It was the time of year when the trees should have been laden with ripening fruit.

The boys' eyes blazed and their fists clenched as

they looked at it. Every tree was dead, some had fallen prostrate, some had been sawn half through, but every one of them was utterly destroyed.

"There's German *kultur* for you," gritted Frank between his teeth.

"The world made no mistake when it called them Huns," growled Tom.

"A swarm of locusts wouldn't have anything on them," said Billy. "Wherever they pass they leave a desert."

"Look what's coming," put in Frank.

A pitiful procession was moving toward them, and the columns swung to the right of the road to let it pass.

"Refugees returning to their homes," remarked Bart.

"To what's left of their homes," corrected Frank. "Just think of what they'll find when they get there."

Wagons passed them filled with household belongings. Women and children walked alongside, some trundling wheel-barrows, others driving dogs harnessed to little carts.

Their faces were worn and thin with privation and suffering, and yet there was the light of hope in their eyes, for they were going home.

"Home!" murmured Frank. "It seems a mock-

ery. A home? That's a mere heap of mortar—all the cattle killed or driven away, all their farm implements sent to Germany, all their trees cut down and ruined. They won't even dare drink the water from their wells. Why, it will take a dozen years before they will be where they were before this war started."

"Never mind, Germany will have to foot the bill," said Tom. "They who dance must pay the piper, and she'll pay in full for this work."

At noon they stopped for mess. Two hours were given for rest, and after the boys had satisfied their hunger, they strolled over to inspect a number of tanks which had been attached to the division and had been parked near by.

"A pretty nifty bunch of machines, it seems to me," remarked Frank approvingly, as he ran his eye critically along the collection of formidable weapons. "But they're not as big as the ones our boys were using a little while ago."

"No," agreed Bart. "But what they lack in size they make up in speed. These things can go as fast as a man can run."

"Did you hear of the one that chased the German general the other day?" grinned Billy. "Say, I'd have given a farm to have been in on that."

"What's the story?" queried Tom.

"Why, the tank showed up in a surprise attack

close to a German division headquarters," explained Billy. "It was early in the morning, and some of the officers were in bed. The tank banged away at a cottage where a fat German general was billeted. He rushed to the door in his pajamas, took one look at the tank, and then beat it up the road."

"The tank chased him, nabbed him, and took him back a prisoner."

The boys laughed.

"What do you think a movie man would have given to have snapped that picture?" grinned Bart.

At that moment a man who had been tinkering with one of the tanks rose to his feet and came toward them. There was a cry of recognition, and the boys rushed to meet him.

"Will Stone, by all that's lucky!" cried Frank, as he grasped the newcomer's hand.

"So you're going with us to join Pershing, too!" exclaimed Bart, delightedly.

"I was thinking of you when I looked at the tank," chimed in Billy. "But I didn't see Jumbo there, so I thought you'd been attached to some other division."

Stone's bronzed, handsome face expressed a pleasure quite equal to their own as he shook hands with each in turn.

"Jumbo is laid up for repairs," he explained. "The old boy's been right in the thick of it and needed a thorough overhauling. In the meantime I've been put in charge of this company of whippets."

"They look like the real goods," said Frank.

"They're dandies," agreed Stone enthusiastically. "They can't walk through a house or butt down a tree as well as old Jumbo used to do but they're mighty husky little machines for all that, and when it comes to speed, these fellows can run rings around anything we've had up to date. You boys are pretty speedy, but you couldn't get away from one of these pets if it were chasing you."

"Isn't it great we're going to be with Pershing?" asked Frank.

"You bet it is!" returned the tank man enthusiastically. "It's just what I've been hoping for. Now Fritz will get just what's coming to him."

"And that will be plenty," said Bart savagely. "What we've seen this morning as we came along has tuned us up to fighting pitch, and we can't wait to lay our hands on the fellows who have done it."

Stone shook his head sadly.

"Isn't it beastly?" he said. "And what you've seen this morning isn't a circumstance to what I've come across. I've been over a part of France

that you boys haven't seen, and honestly, fellows, I wouldn't dare to tell you all I know because you'd think I was lying."

"Well, there's a reckoning time coming, and it's up to us to make it come mighty quick," said Frank. "But we must go now. I expect to hear the bugle any minute. Awfully glad to have met you, old man. Drop in to see us when you can, and we'll have a little gab fest."

"Now if we only had Dick Lever over with us the bunch would be complete," said Bart as they started to go.

"Why, Dick is coming!" exclaimed Stone. "Didn't you know? I saw him yesterday, and he told me he was assigned to Pershing's front."

"Bully boy!" cried Billy, "Good old Dick!"

"Did he tell you how he got us out of that fix in the woods?" asked Bart.

"He told me something about it," answered Stone, smiling. "Some pretty nifty scrapping you had there."

"It was a close shave," admitted Frank. "I thought the whole bunch of us was booked to go West."

"Speaking of Dick," continued Stone, "that fellow certainly bears a charmed life. Did he tell you what happened to him a couple of weeks ago?"

"No," said Frank. "The fact is, we didn't have much time for chinning, and Dick himself was too shaken up by the fall to do much talking."

"Not that that would have made much differene," put in Bart. "Ten to one he wouldn't have told us anyhow. He's as close-mouthed as a clam when it comes to telling you anything he's done."

"What was it?" asked Billy. "Let's have it."

"Why, it was something like this," answered Stone. "He was up in his plane on a special errand and had an observer with him. A Boche machine came along, and of course Dick tackled it. He sent it down all right, but just then three other planes attacked him."

"It was a game of jockeying for position then, and you know what a dabster Dick is at that."

"Finally he got one of the planes where his machine guns could rake it, and he put it out of action. But just then a bullet from the second plane struck a bunch of rockets he was carrying and set them on fire. You know what nine out of ten flyers would have done under those circumstances, don't you?"

"Sure thing," responded Tom. "Skipped for his own lines and worked like a tiger to put out the fire."

"Of course they would," Stone agreed. "But

did Dick do that? Not on your life! He kept on maneuvering until his observer was able to get direct machine gun fire on the two remaining planes and defeat them both.

"Then he turned to with his observer and put out the fire. They beat it out all right, but even then Dick didn't call it a day and go back home. He kept on to the end with the job he had to do just as if nothing had happened, and when he got through, he sailed right on to headquarters and turned in his report. Some class to that boy, fellows."

"There is!" responded Frank warmly.

"All wool and a yard wide," commented Tom. "But there goes the bugle, fellows. So long, old man."

And with a parting wave of the hand the Army Boys hurried off to get in line.

CHAPTER XI

THE PAYMASTER'S MESSAGE

THREE days more of marching, and Frank's division reached its destination. It had been a long tramp, and in some respects a distressing one because of the scenes they had witnessed in the devastated territory through which they had passed.

Where there should have been sunny vineyards and smiling farms and peaceful cottages in thriving villages, there was utter blight and ruin. It was as though the angel of death had passed over the land and blasted everything on it.

If the boys had needed anything to stimulate their eagerness and determination to win, that march had furnished it. The Hun was in for a fearful reckoning.

Their eyes first fell on the American position toward evening of a day during which they had been traversing a rolling country and when they had reached the crest of a hill that commanded a view of the landscape for many miles.

Before them stretched the vast camp that

seemed to have no limit. Thousand of dog tents studded the plains and the slopes of hills. Hundreds of great guns were parked at frequent intervals. Huge caravans of motor lorries were moving rapidly along all the roads in the region. All the units and equipments of a great army ready for battle were in evidence.

But what stirred the boys most of all was the sight of the various division headquarters with the Stars and Stripes floating from their staffs. It thrilled them from head to foot. Somewhere in the distance a band was playing, and as the strains of the Star Spangled Banner floated up to them their hands involuntarily flew to their foreheads in salute.

"Isn't it glorious?" exclaimed Frank.

"That's what America can do when she wakes up," agreed Bart, as his eye roamed over the vast array.

"Pershing's army—our army now!" murmured Tom.

"We are coming, father Abraham,
Ten hundred thousand strong!"

chanted Billy.

"Once let this bunch get going, and it's good night for Fritz," prophesied Frank.

With quickened steps and jubilant hearts, all the weariness of the long tramp forgotten, the division marched down the slope and settled in the quarters that had been reserved for them.

During all these days of marching the thought of that money had been always present with Frank. He wanted to send it on its way overseas, he wanted to put it in his mother's hands, for he knew the sense of comfort and security the money would give her.

Then, too, he was fearful that something might happen to him before he could discharge his trust. There was little danger of theft, for he had taken the precaution of sewing the notes up in an oilskin bag and fastening it securely to the inside of his shirt. But at any moment he might be wounded, or possibly killed. With every day that passed his anxiety became greater to have the money safely out of his hands.

While the march continued this had been impossible, but now that the division had reached its destination and settled down in quarters, he thought it might be managed.

There was no prospect of immediate fighting within the next few days. There was no doubt but that a great battle was being planned for and that the Americans were to attack on a large scale, but there was every indication that a week

or ten days would pass, and it seemed to Frank that this was his chance to take advantage of the lull in the fighting.

The second morning after their arrival in camp he sought out his captain to make his request. The captain acknowledged Frank's salute pleasantly.

"What can I do for you, Sheldon?" he asked.

"I would like to have three days' furlough, sir," said Frank.

"Well," said his officer, "I guess that can be easily arranged. There is no one in the regiment that better deserves it. Where do you want to go?"

Frank mentioned a town about twenty miles distant which he had concluded would be large enough to have a bank where he could buy an American draft for a thousand dollars.

"That will be all right," said the captain. "I'll write you out a pass. How are you going to get there? The railroad between here and there has been destroyed."

"I didn't know that," said Frank. "But I suppose I can walk."

The captain smiled.

"I think you boys have done walking enough for the past week," he said. "I'll fix it up so that you can go on one of the lorries going that way.

They come here packed, but there is usually more room in them going back. Report to me here in an hour and I'll have things ready for you."

Frank thanked him and went back to his comrades. He felt a little uncomfortable about breaking the news to them. Up to this time what few furloughs they had enjoyed had been in each other's company. It would have been all right if he could have told them why he was going, but his promise to Colonel Pavet prevented this. He regretted that he had made that promise. If the colonel had known his chums the way he knew them he would not have exacted any promise.

Well, the thing was settled now, and there was no help for it. Later on he could explain.

"Well, fellows," he said as he joined them, "I'm off."

"Off your nut," gibed Tom. "Tell us something we don't know."

"I'm going on a lorry up to Landes," said Frank. "I'll be back in a day or two. I'll tell you fellows all about it later. The captain's fixing up a pass for me and I've got to hustle to get ready on time."

They were all agog with curiosity, and would have questioned him further, but just at that moment, to Frank's great relief, Corporal Wilson came along and called them out in connection with some matter of camp regulations.

Frank congratulated himself on getting off so easily. He quickly made his few preparations, reported to the captain, and received his pass.

A motor lorry which had just finished unpacking was reloading for its return journey to Landes, and to this Frank had been assigned. The truck was only partly filled, and there was plenty of room for him and the one other passenger who was going in the same direction.

This was a bright, companionable young fellow who Frank soon learned was from the quartermaster's department. He was a talkative youth who had recently come over and was full of reminiscences of his trip across.

He had seen no fighting as yet, and hardly expected to because of the special branch of the service in which he was employed.

"Some fellows have all the luck," he said enviously, when, in response to questions, Frank had told him something of his experience on the fighting line.

"I wanted to get into field service myself, but they shunted me off into the quartermaster's department," he continued. "No chance for me to kill a Hun and get his helmet and iron cross to take back home and tell the folks I did it."

"Never mind," laughed Frank. "Play the game. It's all for Uncle Sam. He puts us where

he thinks we can do the most good, and it's of no use to kick. We fellows on the firing line couldn't do much if you fellows didn't see to getting the grub and supplies for us."

"Oh, I suppose you're right if you look at it that way," said Parker, for so he had introduced himself. "But all the same, when a fellow comes three thousand miles looking for excitement and then finds that he doesn't get into the shindig at all, he can't help feeling a little sore."

"Didn't you have any excitement on the way over?" asked Frank. "A sub scare or something like that?"

"Not even that," mourned Parker. "If there were any submarines in our part of the ocean, they gave us a wide berth. We did have a little fun on board though," he said, grinning reminiscently, "fishing for gulls."

"Fishing for gulls!" repeated Frank, looking puzzled. "I don't quite get you."

"Why," said Parker, "there were a lot of sea gulls—there must have been hundreds of them that followed our ship half way across. You know the screw of the steamer stirs up the fish, and that makes it easy for the gulls to get them, so we always had a flock of them near by. Biggest gluttons in the world, those gulls. Not a thing dropped overboard but what they swooped down upon it in a minute.

"Well, the fellows used to take pieces of meat and tie one on each end of a piece of string about twenty feet long. Then they threw it overboard."

"Down would come a lot of gulls; one would swallow one piece of meat, and another would gulp down the piece on the other end. Then the boys would bet on which one would get the piece of meat away from the other.

"Either one of them could have disgorged the meat if it had wanted to, but much as he wanted to get away from the other fellow, he wanted the meat more, and so they would fly around with the string between them till finally the stronger one would yank it out of the other fellow's throat. Then the fellows that had bet on him would collect from the losers."

Frank laughed heartily.

"Must have helped to kill time anyway," he remarked.

"Yes," agreed Parker. "And that's about all the killing I'm going to do, I guess. I started out to be a soldier. Now I'm nothing more than a bank messenger. I might as well have stayed on the other side for all the fighting I'm going to see."

"Where are you bound for now?" asked Frank.

Parker mentioned a town about five miles beyond Landes.

"I'm taking five thousand francs to the paymaster of another division," he said. "A little matter of transfer to balance up the books."

Frank thought to himself that the young fellow would have been more prudent if he had not been so ready to confide affairs of this nature to a comparative stranger, but he said nothing.

There was some delay owing to a breakdown so that when at last the lorry lumbered into Landes and Frank had bidden a cordial farewell to his traveling companion and the driver, it was past banking hours, and he was obliged to postpone the sending of the money till the next morning.

Still, he did not let that worry him much. The town was so quaint, the sense of freedom from military discipline so delightful, that he strolled in and around the town for some hours before he went to a hotel for supper.

Here he had a simple meal, for food was scarce and dear, as it was everywhere in France. He slept well, free from the thought that reveille would pull him out of bed in the morning whether he would or not.

He woke late, and after breakfast went out immediately to send the money. His perfect French stood him in good stead, and he had no trouble in finding his way to the bank.

There he secured an American draft for one thousand dollars in exchange for his five crisp thousand franc notes. He slipped the draft into a letter which he had already written, and mailed it. Then he drew a long breath of relief.

CHAPTER XII

WAS IT NICK RABIG?

"FIRST time in my life," Frank said to himself amusedly, as he ran down the bank steps, "that I was glad to get rid of money."

Now that the object for which he had come was accomplished, he was surprised to see how eager he was to get back to the regiment. If Bart and Billy and Tom had been with him it would have been different, but he had gotten so used to their companionship, that nothing seemed to appeal to him that did not include them also.

Then, too, if any fighting should take place he did not want to be out of it.

But getting back was not as easy as the coming had been. His instructions were to go back by lorry as he had come. There were a great many going out continually, but they were so loaded to the roofs with supplies for the army that passengers were out of the question.

At last, however, he found one where he could wedge himself in after a fashion, and shortly after mess that night he found himself back again with the old Thirty-Seventh.

He reported to his captain, and then made his way to his chums, who greeted him with whoops of delight.

"Stingy!" said Tom with mock reproach, after the first tumult of welcome was over. "Why didn't you put in a good word for us and take us with you if you are going to play hookey, answer me that?"

"You bet I would if it had been only a joy ride," Frank responded. "But this was strictly business. You see, fellows, it was this way. Remember the day I saw Colonel Pavet? He had a lot of money—that is, it seemed a lot to me—that he had secured from my mother's property. He made me promise I'd say nothing about it till I had put it safely away. Hardest thing I ever did was to keep the secret from you fellows. I've been just aching to tell you all about it.

"If I'd had a chance to see the colonel again I'd have got him to release me from the promise. But I haven't seen him, so I had to keep my word. I mailed the money to-day, and by this time it's well on the way."

They were all delighted to learn of his good luck.

"You bloated old plutocrat!" exclaimed Bart Raymond affectionately, clapping Frank on the shoulder.

"I suppose there will be plenty more where that came from," put in Billy.

"I'm tickled to death to hear of your luck, old man," added Tom.

"Thanks," beamed Frank. "I don't care so much for myself, but I'm mighty glad for my mother's sake that she isn't going to be cheated out of her rights."

They chatted for awhile about the incidents of his trip and Frank told them about the talkative young paymaster's clerk who had shared his journey.

"Do you know, there's one queer thing, fellows," he continued. "Of course you'll think I'm crazy, but I could have sworn to-day that I saw Nick Rabig."

There was a chorus of ejaculations that would not have sounded flattering to that person if he had heard them.

"That yellow dog!" shouted Bart.

"That skunk!" excaimed Billy.

"The sneaking hound," gritted Tom, as there came before his eyes the scene in the woods when, from his perch in the tree, he had seen Rabig plotting with a German officer the betrayal of his comrades.

"But you must be dreaming," objected Bart,

with vigor. "How on earth could Nick Rabig be anywhere within the American lines?"

"He knows his life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel if he were caught," added Tom.

"Tell us all about it," urged Billy.

"Of course, it sounds ridiculous, and I'm not a bit sure about it myself," said Frank. "I'll tell you just how it was. I was taking a walk around the town of Landes, which isn't very big, and before I knew it I found myself on its outskirts near a big wood.

"As I turned a bend in the road I saw a fellow before me in an American uniform. There was something about him that seemed familiar and I shouted to him. He turned around and looked at me. His cap was pulled down over his eyes and I couldn't get a very good sight of him, but what I did see brought Rabig to my mind.

"The fellow was right close to the edge of the woods," he continued, "and he slipped into them like a ghost. I ran after him, but I couldn't find a trace of him, though I hunted for a long time. Now, what do you think of that?"

The boys looked at each other in some perplexity.

"Of course it couldn't have been Nick," affirmed Bart.

"If Nick Rabig ever gets within the American

lines it will be because he was sent there a prisoner," said Billy.

"You bet he's eating sausage and sauerkraut with his German pals," said Tom. "I only wish I could come face to face with him some day in battle, and get a crack at him."

"You won't if he sees you first," grinned Billy.

"Of course," admitted Frank, "it was possibly only a resemblance. I suppose there are a lot of men in the American army who look like Nick—"

"What a knock for the American army," interrupted Tom.

"But," Frank went on, musingly, "if it wasn't Nick, why did he run away from me? I should think he'd be glad to see a fellow in an American uniform, just as I was."

"Oh, well," said Tom, "what's the use of puzzling what we call our brains about it? We couldn't hunt him up if we wanted to. Even if we got the chance it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Besides, we've got something more important to think about than Nick Rabig."

"What's up?" asked Frank, alert on the instant. "Anything big doing?"

"Great things, I imagine," Tom replied. "Of course we don't know for sure, since the officers don't consult us—

"Ours not to make reply,
Ours not to reason why,
Ours but to do or die,"

hummed Billy.

"Cut out the poetry, you chump," said Frank. "I want to hear what Tom was going to say."

"You won't hear much then," confessed Tom. "For I'm only putting two and two together and making a guess. There's been a lot of hustling around here to-day that makes me think we're going into action. I know the signs pretty well by this time."

"For instance?" queried Frank.

"Well," said Tom, "we've had two days' rations served out to us, that's one thing. Then, too, the nom coms have been around among the men, finding out which of the fellows can swim. They've been bunching a lot of artillery, too, on the river bank about a mile from here. Now they're not doing that just for pure fun, are they?"

"Sounds reasonable," agreed Frank. "And it looks as though it were a little out of the usual line, too. Say, fellows, what I might have missed if I hadn't come home to-night!"

"Where do you dope it out that we're going to pitch into things?" queried Bart.

"Do you remember where that little church stands about a mile from here to the left?" began Billy. "Well, I have a hunch it's going to be there."

"Why?" asked Frank.

"Well," said Billy, "it's the only place in the river where a fellow needs to swim. The water's low this time of the year, and most places one can wade across."

"Seems to me, then," said the practical Tom, "that the army ought to pick out one of these places. Then all the men could get across whether they can swim or not."

"No," objected Frank. "I don't think you've got the right dope, Tom. Don't you suppose the Boches know as much about that river as we do? Remember, they held the ground here before we drove them back, and you can bet they have sounded the river and know to the inch how deep it is in every part of it. I'll tell you what the game is, fellows: The very fact that it is so deep there that it could be crossed only by swimming will make the Huns less careful in defending it. They'll have their machine guns and batteries massed at other places where they think there's a chance of crossing. Well, that's just where we'll catch them napping."

"I see," said Bart, thoughtfully. "It's the same

principle that Billy Keeler used to use in running up his batteries—'Hit 'em where they ain't.' "

"Exactly!" responded Frank. "In other words, we'll cross the river—"

"And double cross the dirty Huns!" grinned Billy.

The boys laughed, and just then the bugle sounded taps, and the budding generals tumbled into their blankets.

CHAPTER XIII

AN AMAZING EXPLOIT

THE sleep of the Army Boys was shorter than usual that night, for long before dawn reveille sounded.

They sprang up, rubbing their eyes, and, seeing that it was still dark, realized that this day had been chosen for the battle.

"Guess my hunch was right, all right," said Tom, as after mess the regiment fell into line. "There's something big on hand or we wouldn't be routed out at an hour like this."

"It was a good tip," admitted Bart.

"Lucky it's so warm," remarked Billy. "The water won't feel a bit bad when it comes to swimming."

The old Thirty-Seventh, together with the other regiments of the same division, was marched up the river bank about a mile before it halted. Then it was drawn up in line of battle, but in a different formation than usual.

The men who could swim were gathered in the first ranks and every superfluous thing in their equipment was laid aside. Dawn was just coming

up the eastern sky, a light mist rose from the little river, which at this point was about a hundred and sixty-five feet wide. The further bank could not be seen at first, but as the mist melted away they could see that on the further side was a broad stretch of mud about half a mile in width.

Beyond this was a canal running parallel to the river itself. The further wall of the canal was steep and built of stone. Beyond this they knew that the enemy was posted, although as yet no roar of guns had come to betray his presence.

Frank and his comrades, all of whom were expert swimmers, were in the first rank, and their eager eyes studied every detail of the scene before them.

They had been in many battles, but none like this promised to be.

"Some job, fellows," remarked Frank.

"You've said it!" replied Bart.

"I see where some of the old Thirty-Seventh lose the number of their mess to-day."

"It's a stiff proposition," Billy observed. "It's a compliment to our division to give us a thing like this to tackle. What are those fellows doing over there with those ropes?" he added.

They looked to their left, where men of the engineering corps were busy unrolling from steel drums long coils of rope.

"Getting ready to hang the Kaiser, I guess," grinned Bart.

"Enough rope there for the whole royal family," added Tom, "with Hindenburg and Ludendorff thrown in for good measure."

"What's the game, I wonder?" asked Billy.

"Blessed if I know," said Tom.

At other sections of the line there was great activity. Close to the bank of the river a force of men was making pontoons, but this was at a considerable distance up the bank from where the boys stood.

"Looks as though we were going across on those," said Tom.

"No," conjectured Frank, "the pontoons are probably for the tanks or the artillery. They'll be needed to back us up after we get across."

At this moment the lieutenant passed along the front line, selected a number of the men, including the four Army Boys, and led them down to the drums on which the ropes were coiled.

"Now," he said, "what you boys are to do is this. The artillery will open up in five minutes. They will lay down a barrage for your protection. When you get the word, you fellows are to dash into the river, each one of you holding to the one end of the rope. You're to get that across and fasten it anyway you can on the other side. Then

the fellows who can't swim will follow you over, holding on to the ropes. You will get the rest of your orders later.

He passed on to another platoon and the boys looked at each other,

"Some job!" muttered Tom.

"Just a little trifle like that," murmured Bart.

"Sounds easy when you say it quick," grinned Billy.

"Something new in our young lives," remarked Frank. "But after all, variety's the spice of life—"

"Or death," muttered Tom.

"Well, there's something sure," said Bart. "The fellows who come through this thing alive will have something to talk about when they get back home."

There was a moment or two of tense expectation, and then the American guns opened up. A terrific storm of shot and shell, before which it seemed that nothing could live, swept across the river and searched out the trenches on the other side.

For ten minutes this continued, and then the word was given to charge.

The foremost ranks threw themselves into the river and set out for the other side. It was a more trying experience than any to which they

had yet been subjected. On other occasions they had had their guns in their hands. Now they were defenseless, and simply offered a target to their enemies.

Nor were those enemies slow to seize the opportunity. A veritable hail of fire and death churned the river from the batteries of machine guns posted on the further shore.

Men went down, leaving the ropes they carried to drift upon the current, but others picked them up, and those left kept on undaunted, cleaving the water with desperate energy, keeping as much of their bodies under the surface as possible, their eyes glued on the further shore.

Frank and his chums, side by side, were the first to reach the bank. They fastened the ropes around the first thing they could find, stumps, rocks, thickets of underbrush.

As soon as this was done, their comrades on the further shore rushed into the water, grasped the taut ropes, and, hand over hand, worked their way to the further shore.

While this was being done, the engineers had thrown two pontoons across the river. One of these was swept away at once by heavy artillery fire, but the engineers, nothing daunted, set to work upon another.

The second bridge was more fortunate, and

soon a procession of light tanks, spitting fire from the muzzles of their machine guns, were rushing over it to support the scanty infantry forces that had already reached the opposite bank.

The losses had been heavy, but little by little those forces on the further side were strengthened until most of the divisions had gathered and reformed. Not only the ropes were used, but, as though by magic, a number of rafts and collapsible boats were launched at a score of points, each carrying its load of fighting men, eager to join their comrades in the fray.

"We're getting there," cried Frank, exultantly, as, after perhaps an hour of this fierce endeavor, the river had been crossed.

"Yes, but look what's before us," said Tom. "This is only the beginning."

Before them stretched a sea of mud, one-half of a mile in width, raked and shelled by the enemy's fire. There was absolutely no protection—not a tree, not a rock, studded the whole desolate expanse. It seemed like sheer suicide to cross that marshland where speed was impossible and where the men sank in deep at every step.

But the American army had long before this taken the word "impossible" out of their dictionary. Their commanders had ordered them to cross that flat, and, very well, they would cross it.

And cross it they did, men falling at every step, dead or desperately wounded, their feet clogged with mud, struggling on as though in a nightmare, but always on.

How they did it they never knew, but at last the marsh was crossed, and, panting, gasping, yet with spirit aflame, their officers gathered them together for a still further test of courage.

They had reached now a small canal which ran roughly parallel to the river. In parts further up it was shallow, but where the Army Boys chanced to be it was too deep to be crossed by wading.

On the further side it was lined by a stone wall, absolutely smooth and about ten feet from the surface of the canal to the top.

"Have to be flies to crawl up that," muttered Tom, as he took in the situation.

"Got to be done," said Frank.

"But how?" asked Billy.

The engineers had already solved that problem. Over the pontoon bridge they had rushed supplies of grappling hooks, shaped like anchors.

These were hastily distributed among the foremost ranks, who rushed into the waters of the canal, swam across, and threw the grappling hooks over the coping of the canal wall. Up the ropes attached to the grappling hooks they

swarmed, hand over hand, until the walls of the canal were black with climbing men.

Behind them came their comrades until the old Thirty-Seventh and its sister regiments had gathered on the bank. Quickly they formed themselves in rank, and then the command ran along the whole front.

"Fix bayonets! Charge!"

They charged—and how they charged! Ask history, that never recorded a more glorious exploit. Ask the Huns, who melted away before that charge.

Their blood was up, and nothing on earth could stop them. In vain the enemy mustered his batteries. In vain the machine guns sent streams of bullets into the advancing ranks. In vain their officers tried to rally their men as the Americans burst upon them, tore into them, shooting, stabbing, hacking, clubbing.

And then, to complete the rout, into the mêlée came ploughing the tanks, smashing through every defense, tearing up the barbed wire entanglements as though they were so much paper, battering down the pill boxes and redoubts in which the enemy had trusted, making huge gaps through which the American boys poured in droves.

In less than an hour the fight was over. But it

was not in the last desperate dash that the American troops had won their fight. They had won it when they plunged into the river, they had won it when they crossed the marsh, they had won it when they scaled the walls with grappling hooks. For those were the things that had shaken the enemy's morale and made their hearts turn to water.

Mere men, the Huns were willing to meet—before these supermen they quailed!

CHAPTER XIV

LIKE A THUNDERBOLT

THE first line trenches of the enemy had been completely overrun. The Huns had retreated to their second line about two miles further back.

The tanks went thundering on in pursuit, and the men, exhausted as they were, would have been glad to follow, but their officers restrained them.

The position was hastily consolidated and fortified against a possible counter attack by the enemy. There was no knowing at what time fresh divisions might be brought up and thrown into the fray, and the American leaders were taking no chances.

There was still a good deal of "mopping up" to be done, and platoons were told off for this work. There were many dugouts and connecting trenches in which small parties of the enemy had sought refuge, and where they huddled together, either hoping to escape detection or to be able to rejoin their comrades, should the trenches be retaken.

These were hunted out of their burrows, however, like so many rabbits. Where there was any

hesitation, or hint of resistance, the threat of a hand grenade proved very effective.

It was Billy Waldon who won the chief honors and had the most fun in this part of the work. Here is the way he told the story to his comrades afterward.

"I don't know how I came to be separated from you fellows," he said, grinning beatifically, "but it certainly was luck for once. Thought we'd found all the dear little Fritzie's in the place when I suddenly came upon a regular cunning little nest of them."

"Gee, sounds as if you were describing cooties," Tom interrupted.

"Wouldn't insult the cooties," responded Billy, while the boys chuckled. "Anyway, there were ten of 'em, perfect little Heinies about six feet two, with a wounded major in command."

"Command!" repeated Tom, scornfully. "Command of what?"

"Don't ask me," replied Billy, while the others hissed Tom into silence. "He didn't seem to know himself. Anyway, as I was saying, they were there just waiting to be captured, so I favored them with a smile and asked them cordially to join me in a little stroll.

"The major didn't seem inclined to treat my little invitation with the respect it deserved, but

when I threatened to spill a handful of harmless little grenades on him you should have seen him toddle.

"Seemed to come so hard to surrender to a mere private that I couldn't help assisting him with a persuasive little kick from my number nine as he pased."

"Very disrespectful," murmured Tom, while the others grinned delightedly and Frank gave Billy a resounding slap on the back.

"Some work, old man!" he shouted. "Couldn't do much better myself."

"Eleven little Heinies at one fell swoop!" added Bart, happily. "Keep that up, and between us we'll capture the whole German army."

Soon the work of rounding up was completed. The prisoners were herded together and sent to the rear. Then the bugle sounded for mess, and it seemed to the boys they had seldom heard a sound more grateful.

"Gee, but we're a lot of hobos," said Frank, as seated on the ground, he surveyed his companions who were splattered with black mud from head to foot.

"If I'd ever come to the table with hands like this when I was a kid," said Bart, ruefully, "I'd have been sent away in short order." He surveyed his hands critically.

"Hobos or not, I bet there are lots of people in the United States wouldn't be ashamed to shake hands with us to-day," crowed Billy, still elated over his capture.

"Luckily enough we've got hands to hold the grub after this day's work," said Tom. "Ever heard the story, fellows, of the Irishman who had his arm shot off?"

"Go ahead and tell us," said Frank. "We'll eat while you talk."

"Yes, it's fine to have a little music on the side," chuckled Bart.

"Even if it's only chin music, and Tom's at that," added Billy.

"Sure Tom's a whole band when he gets started," added Frank, with a grin. "It would be like dining at a fashionable restaurant with a hidden orchestra—"

"Who said hidden?" interrupted Bart. "Some things are too good to be true."

"Cut it out, will you?" growled Tom, making a pass at the nearest of his tormentors, which was dexterously dodged. "Do you boobs want to hear this on not?"

"Fire away," mumbled Bart, between mouthfuls. "I guess we can stand it."

"Pat had lost his arm," said Tom, "and after he'd had first aid and was waiting to be taken to the rear, they saw him looking anxiously around.

" 'What are you looking for, Pat?' some one asked. 'Me arrum,' said Pat. 'Gee, what do you want of that?' the other asked curiously. 'It's no good to you now.' 'Sure it isn't that,' explained Pat, still peering about. 'But that arrum had me wrist watch on it an' by jabbers I want it.' "

The boys laughed and plunged voraciously into the rations before them.

They had not yet finished their meal when Will Stone passed near them.

"Hello, Will," shouted Frank.

"Whither bound, sweet one?" called Tom, his mouth full.

"Come hither and bide a while," added Bart.

"I don't know whether I ought to be seen in such company," grinned Stone. "Gee, what have you been doing? Taking a mud bath for your beauty? I never saw such a crowd!"

"Sure," said Billy with a grin. "The captain recommended it. Thought we were getting a little run down."

"Yah," groaned Bart. "Our fatal gift of beauty wasn't as noticeable as usual."

"Come over here and talk to the only sensible one in the crowd," grinned Frank. "Success has turned their heads. How did you get here, old scout? I can understand how we fellows did it, but how did you transport the tanks? Didn't fly, did you?"

"No," laughed Stone. "The Huns did the flying."

"That reminds me," broke in Tom.

"Officer, he's in again," groaned Billy.

"It was like this," continued Tom, unperturbed. "An officer saw one of his men making for the rear, scared to death. 'What are you running for?' he demanded. 'Good heavens, Captain, because I can't fly,' the fellow answered."

"The Boches are troubled by no such limitations," crowed Billy. "If they didn't fly they gave a pretty good imitation."

Frank looked at Stone disgustedly.

"You see the kind of comedy stuff I'm up against all the time," he grinned, in mock despair. "Now, if they'll give you a chance, tell us how your tank got over."

"That was easy," said Stone. "We crossed a little higher up than you fellows did. The mud wasn't quite so bad there, and anyway that new tank of mine carries a carpet along with us."

"Has Sir Walter Raleigh beaten a mile," interpolated Billy.

Frank looked around for something to throw at him. "What would you do with it?" he asked. "On with the tale, Stone."

"The carpet makes a path for us over the mud," Stone explained, with a grin for Billy.

"And we have regular mud guards to scrape it off as we go along."

"That's great stuff," said Frank, interestedly. "But what did you do when you came to the canal? Those tanks of yours can do wonders in climbing but they can't walk up a perpendicular wall."

"That's a problem; or at least it was," said Stone. "We worried about it for a while, but then one of our fellows had an inspiration."

"One of our fellows!" laughed Frank. "I bet I know who it was."

"Never mind that," said Stone, hastily. "A bunch of us got together and ran our tanks into the canal where the water was low. We laid them alongside each other until they filled the whole canal from bank to bank. That made a path, and the other tanks used us as a bridge and crossed over. You see we simply had to get into this scrap," he finished simply.

"By Jove, we have to hand it to you fellows!" cried Frank, enthusiastically.

"It was great to see the way you ploughed into them," chimed in Billy. "Those wire entanglements went down like so many cobwebs."

"Oh, the old tanks aren't so bad," agreed Stone. "As a matter of fact, all the boys did good work to-day. Those engineer fellows, you noticed, weren't slow a bit."

"They were wonders," agreed Tom.

"Well, much as I hate to leave you, duty calls me hence," said Stone, rising. "So long, fellows."

There was little more fighting done that day. The enemy had been too completely demoralized to make any counter attacks, and the rest of the afternoon was spent in making their position secure.

Then, too, on both sides, there were the dead to be buried, the wounded to be attended to, and the field to be cleared up. By the time this was done the day was fairly over.

Late in the afternoon the regiment was lined up as though for review. This was unusual after they had gone through such hard fighting, and it caused some surprise.

"Now what's up?" said Frank.

"Some high muckamuck come to look us over," grumbled Tom.

"I don't care for this review stuff myself," remarked Billy. "I think we've worked hard enough to call it a day and let it go at that."

An officer appeared in company with a private, whose head was bandaged, and passed along the line. Frank gave a start of surprise as he recognized, despite the bandages, the paymaster's clerk who had been his companion on the trip to Landes.

"What's the matter?" whispered Bart, who stood next to him.

Frank was about to explain, but just then the officer approached and it was necessary to stand at attention. As they passed each rank of men, the paymaster's clerk, Parker, scanned carefully the faces of the men.

As his eyes fell on Frank he seemed about to utter an exclamation and lifted his hand as though to point at him.

There was a warning touch from the officer, however, and a whispered conversation ensued. Then the two turned and went back, and a moment later the signal came to break ranks.

"All that lining up for nothing," grumbled Tom.

"If so soon 'twas to be done for
I wonder why it was begun for?"

quoted Billy.

Frank, too, wondered, and with the wonder was blended a slight uneasiness. Nor was this decreased when a few moments later an order came directing him to report to regimental headquarters.

"They want to promote you, I guess," grinned Billy. "Give you the war cross or something like that."

"No such luck," returned Frank as he hurried off.

He found in the room when he entered his captain and lieutenant together with the young paymaster's assistant. Frank saluted and waited.

"Sheldon," said his captain, "do you know this man?"

"Yes, sir," replied Frank, promptly.

"When did you first meet him?" pursued the captain.

"The day I went to Landes," said Frank, somewhat puzzled by the turn the questions were taking. "Let me see, that was day before yesterday."

"What were the circumstances?" asked the captain.

"He traveled in the same lorry that I did," answered Frank. "I got off at Landes and he went on."

"Did he tell you where he was going?" continued the captain.

"Yes sir," Frank replied. "I understand that he was going to the headquarters of the Forty-Third division a few miles beyond Landes."

"Going directly there?" persisted the captain.

"Why," said Frank cudgeling his memory, "I don't think the lorry was going directly there. Seems to me he said that he'd have to get off

about a mile this side and go through a patch of woods."

"Hm," mused the questioner, as he digested this information. "Did he tell you anything else?"

"Yes," responded Frank. "He said that he was carrying five thousand francs."

The captain looked him in the eye as if he would bore him through.

"He was robbed of that five thousand francs," he said abruptly, "and he says that you're the man who robbed him!"

CHAPTER XV

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

FRANK stood for a moment as though petrified. Then rage woke in him.

His first impulse was to turn upon his accuser and strike him to the ground.

Parker saw the look that blazed in his eyes, and involuntarily retreated a little closer to the officers who were watching both with the intentness of hawks.

Luckily Frank remembered in time where he was, and the habit of military discipline asserted itself. He clicked his heels together and stood at attention.

"Well, Sheldon," went on the captain, not unkindly, for he, like all the officers in the regiment, was exceedingly fond of the gallant young soldier who had proved equal to every task that had been given him, "what have you to say to this?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Frank quietly, for he had now gotten himself wholly in hand, "except that of course it is an utter falsehood. I have never done a dishonest thing in my life."

"There certainly has never been any one in the regiment in whom I have had more complete confidence," replied the captain, "and I can promise you, Sheldon, that you will continue to hold it until I have absolute proof that you are unworthy of it. You can imagine how shocked I was when this man came to me with his story. But the charge has been brought, and of course I shall have to sift it to the bottom."

"I ask nothing better, sir," answered Frank. "I haven't the least idea of the grounds on which this man brings his ridiculous charge. But I'm ready to answer every question either you or he want to ask and tell you everything I know."

The captain turned to Parker.

"Suppose you repeat the story that you have just told the lieutenant and myself," he suggested.

"Well," said Parker, a little hesitatingly, "when I left this man I had only a few miles further to go. The lorry didn't go very close to the headquarters of the division I was bound for, and I had quite a little walking to do. I didn't mind that though, for I had been there before and knew a path that led through the woods. I was going along and just as I was going through a place where the woods were thickest I got a hard blow on the head. It didn't knock me out, but it made me sick and dizzy. I tried to grapple with

the man who had struck me, but he was bigger and stronger than I was, and then, too, I was weak from the blow. I didn't get a good look at him, but as I remember him he was about the build of this man here. He gave me another crack with something he had in his hand, and that finished me. I must have lain there for some time, for when I came to myself, it was dark. I managed to find my way to the division headquarters, and one of the doctors there fixed me up. When I thought of the money and felt for it it was gone. That's about all, sir. After I'd got bandaged up and had a night's sleep they sent me back here to see if I could find the man I'd been traveling with. I had heard him say that he was a member of the Thirty-Seventh regiment, and so I came straight here."

The story was simple and straighforward, and there was no evidence of malice in it. It evidently so impressed the captain as he looked inquiringly at Frank.

"May I ask him a question or two, sir?" Frank inquired.

"Certainly," replied his superior. "That is only your right, and it may clear this mysterious matter up."

"How do you know you were robbed?" he asked. "Couldn't the money have fallen out of your pocket in the struggle!"

"No," was the prompt reply. "I had it in an inside pocket, and to make it more safe I had sewed it up. When I felt for it I found that pocket had been ripped open."

"But, admitting that you were robbed," continued Frank, "what makes you think that I'm the man who robbed you?"

"Because," said Parker, "you were the only man except the paymaster himself who knew that I had the money with me."

"If I knew it, it was because you told me, wasn't it?" asked Frank. "I didn't pump you to see if you had any money with you, did I?"

"No," admitted Parker. "But when you found it out it might have put the idea of robbing me in your mind."

There was force in this argument and Frank felt it.

"That is true," he agreed. "But I had left you some time before. How could I have been there in the woods lying in wait for you?"

Parker considered a moment.

"There were other lorries coming along the road," he said slowly. "You might have got a lift in one of those and come on right behind me. You knew I was going through the woods, and it wouldn't have been a hard matter to cut in somewhere ahead of me. For that matter you might

have come up behind me. Then there's one thing, too, I haven't mentioned!" he exclaimed. "The man I was struggling with had on a soldier's khaki uniform just like that you're wearing now."

Here the captain interrupted.

"These are only suppositions," he remarked. "There isn't enough proof there to hang a yellow dog. The only point that is at all important is that Sheldon knew this man had the money. That is something to be considered, but even that wouldn't amount to anything unless other circumstances backed it up."

"If I may interrupt," suggested the lieutenant, speaking for the first time during the conference, "there may be a simple way of determining whether Sheldon could have done this thing or not."

"How?" asked the captain.

By showing where he was at the time the theft was committed," the lieutenant replied. "When he got off the lorry he probably went at once to a hotel. The hotel keeper could probably tell at what time he registered. If he says that Sheldon was at his place at the time this man was robbed that settles the whole question right there. He couldn't have been in two places at the same time."

"That's right," said the captain.

"How about it, Sheldon?" he asked, turning to Frank hopefully.

Frank's heart had leaped with elation at this possible proof of his innocence. The next moment it sank like lead, for he remembered how he had sauntered about the town for a long while, repoicing in his new found liberty before going to the hotel.

"Why, the fact is, sir," he explained, "I didn't go straight to the hotel. My legs had been cramped from the tight quarters in the lorry, and I was glad to stretch them for a while. So it must have been an hour or two before I turned up at the hotel."

"An hour or two!" exclaimed Parker. "That would have given him plenty of time to have robbed me and gone back."

The captain checked him abruptly, but he himself was sorely disappointed at Frank's admission.

"That was very unfortunate, Sheldon," he said, and Frank in his sensitive condition thought that he could detect a certain chilliness in his tone. "I would have given a great deal if you had done the usual thing and gone to the hotel at once. By the way, Sheldon," he went on as a thought struck him. "Just what was your errand at Landes that day?"

Frank saw at once the implication that might be drawn from the answer he was compelled to give but he did not hesitate for an instant.

"I went there, sir," he said, "to forward some money to my mother in America."

"Ah," said the captain at the mention of the word money. "I don't like to pry into your personal affairs, Sheldon, but you will understand that I'm only doing it with the hope of clearing this thing up to your advantage. Would you mind telling me how much you sent?"

"Not at all, sir," said Frank promptly, though he felt that every word was involving him in a mesh of grave suspicion. "I sent five thousand francs."

The words seemed to be like an electric shock to all in the room.

"Five thousand francs!" exclaimed Parker. "The very amount that I was robbed of!"

"Five thousand francs?" repeated the captain, in amazement.

"Just a moment, sir," interrupted the lieutenant. "What was this money in, coin or bills?"

"Bills," replied Frank. "There were five notes of a thousand francs each."

Into Parker's eyes came a look of finality.

"That settles it!" he exclaimed. "That was just the form my money was in."

"I admit that it looks bad, sir," said poor Frank, his heart sinking, though his eyes were as steady and level as ever, as he fixed them upon his captain. "But after all, it was only a coincidence. I know absolutely nothing about the robbery."

"Coincidence!" snorted Parker, contemptuously. "A coincidence like that wouldn't happen once in a thousand years."

"Keep still, young man," the captain rebuked him.

For a full minute there was silence in the room. There were two flaming points in Frank's cheeks, but his gaze never fell beneath those which his officers bent upon him.

A thought came to the captain.

"How did you send this money, Sheldon?" he asked.

"I bought an American draft from the bank at Landes," replied Frank.

"On the day you went there?" continued the officer, eagerly.

"No," said Frank. "The bank was closed when I got there, and I had to wait till the next day."

"The day after I was robbed," put in Parker, significantly.

Frank felt as if he were in a nightmare. This thing had come to him like a bolt from the blue.

Everything pointed to him as the spokes of a wheel point to the hub. He knew that on the evidence so far submitted any jury in the world would without hesitation have held him guilty of the robbery.

But then a ray of hope came to him.

"I see exactly how this must seem to you, sir," he said to the captain. "It's a terrible combination of circumstances. But I can prove to you that I had five one thousand franc notes long before I ever met this man."

The captain and lieutenant visibly brightened.

"Good!" exclaimed the captain. "Where did you get them?"

"From Colonel Pavet of the French Sixth Army," replied Frank. "He's colonel of the Twenty-Second Regiment in the Seventeenth Division."

"Why did he give you the money?" asked the captain.

"It was my own money," explained Frank. "Rather, it was my mother's. She is of French birth, and formerly lived in Auvergne. An estate was left to her, but she has had some trouble in getting possession of it. Colonel Pavet was an old friend of my mother's family, and interested himself in her behalf. I met him some weeks ago, and he gave me this money, which had been sent

to him by his brother Andre as part of the income from the estate."

'That's good news, Sheldon," said the captain cordially. "All we have to do now is get in touch with Colonel Pavet and have him confirm your statement. Not that I doubt it, understand, but of course confirmation is necessary."

He pressed a button and an orderly entered.

"Get me the Sixth French Army, Seventeenth Division, Twenty-Second Regiment," he ordered.

The connection was made with some difficulty, and the captain put the telephone to his lips. Frank listened with beating heart.

"Hello," said the captain. "French Sixth Army, Seventeenth Division, Twenty-Second Regiment."

Then he gave his own name and rank—Captain Baker—and his division.

"Is Colonel Pavet there?" he went on. "What's that—no? Where is he? Gone to Italy? Please repeat that—connection's bad. Where can I reach him there by telegraph? . . . Don't know. . . . Too bad. . . . When will he be back? . . . Can't tell? Secret diplomatic mission? Not allowed to tell his whereabouts? Let me know as soon as he does return, will you? Yes. Thanks. Goodbye."

He hung up the receiver, and as he turned to

his auditors saw that there was no need of explaining further than his disjointed sentences had done.

"That's unfortunate," he said; "but you see how it is. We can't go any further in this matter until Colonel Pavet returns. Then I hope a word from him will clear everything up at once. In the meantime, Sheldon, you understand that this matter is kept in suspense. Not a word of it will be breathed either by the lieutenant or myself. And as for you, Parker," he continued, "I want you to keep absolute silence until I give you leave to speak. I'm sorry you lost the money, and you have done just right in coming to me and telling me all about it. But not a word.

"That will be all, Sheldon," he said.

Frank saluted and left the room. His mind was in a whirl from all that had happened. That he, Frank Sheldon, who had never wilfully done a wrong to any one should be suspected of such a crime as this! It was unbelievable! And yet it was true! He was hurt to the quick.

The consciousness that he was innocent had of course its consolation, but that was not enough. It galled him terribly to feel that there was any one in the world who, however lightly, might think him possibly guilty.

But there were some he knew on whose unfail-

ing faith in him he could absolutely depend, and he went straight to his chums to relieve his pent up feelings.

"Well, where's your marshal's baton?" Billy was beginning to joke when he caught the look on Frank's face and stopped in quick alarm.

"Why, what's the matter, Frank?" he asked. "You're as white as a ghost."

"Matter enough," replied Frank, bitterly. "You didn't know, did you, that I was suspected of being a thief?"

"Ah, cut out the comedy," said Bart, coming up and hearing the last words.

"Straight goods," replied Frank, and then into their indignant and astonished ears he poured out the story of that crowded hour in the captain's quarters.

They were filled with rage and sympathy. Parker's ears would have burned had he heard what they said about him.

"Easy there," expostulated Frank. "You can't blame Parker much. He's acted in good faith right along. I suppose if we'd been in his place we'd have done the same thing. It's simply a horrible mess that I'm up against until Colonel Pavet gets back."

"Here's hoping the colonel won't be killed," said Tom, with his instinct for looking on the dark side of things.

"I hope not," replied Frank, "for his sake and for mine. But even if he were, we could hunt up his brother and prove that he'd sent the money to the colonel to be given to me. It will be all right in the end. But it certainly makes me sore to think I may have to wait for weeks or for months before I'm able to prove that what I said was true."

"Why didn't you tell us fellows about it all when you first got the money?" asked Bart, a little reproachfully.

"Oh, well," said Billy cheerfully, "just forget the whole rotten business, old scout. You know you're all right, and we know you're all right, and soon everybody will know you're all right."

"That's the best kind of dope," agreed Bart, giving Frank an affectionate thump on the shoulder. "It isn't worth worrying about. It's just a bad dream, and you'll be hearing reveille before you know it. Then you'll wonder why you ever let it worry you."

Their cheer and faith braced Frank up, and they changed the subject.

"Wonder what the outlook is for a scrap tomorrow," he said.

"Not very promising," prophesied Billy. "I think it will be more of a chase than a fight. What they got this morning will hold them for a while."

"Don't be too chipper," advised Tom. "We don't know how many divisions they may be bringing up to-night. They're keen to hold this sector, because if they don't it will expose their flank."

"Well," said Bart, "I agree with Billy. I think we'll just be marking time for the next few days as far as fighting is concerned."

CHAPTER XVI

THE ENEMY AT BAY

But if the Army Boys thought that the enemy had no fight left in them they reckoned without their host, for on the next day with fresh divisions they made a desperate effort to turn the tables.

The German barrage started suddenly and without the slightest warning. It was one of the heaviest they had ever laid down on that or any other sector, their big guns keeping up a thunderous chorus that made the foundations of the earth tremble and rock. The fire from the enemy lines appeared to be one continuous sheet of flame, and this time their aim was better than usual, for their shells fell thick in the American lines. So sudden and fierce was the attack, that even the keenly alert Americans were for a short time taken at a disadvantage. It was but a very short time, however, before the heavy American guns began to speak the words of death and give back shell for shell. But the Germans had had the advantage that invariably accompanies a surprise attack, and before the Americans could

really bring the full strength of their artillery to bear, the Boche bombardment ceased, and a few seconds later grey coated figures began scrambling out of the enemy trenches and running toward the American lines.

But they did not get very far. The Yankees had by now completely recovered their customary coolness, and in addition to the big guns, machine guns and rifles set up a deafening fusillade, and swept a withering fire into the closely massed ranks of the attackers. At first the Germans came on with dogged and sullen persistence, regardless of their appalling losses, as their men were stricken down in long lines. But so intense and so deadly accurate did the American fire become that it was not in human nature, or at least the Boche type of human nature, to withstand it. Their line hesitated, wavered, and then broke, the men turning and rushing madly back to the shelter their trenches afforded.

A great cheer broke from hundreds of American throats as the last German disappeared, leaving numberless killed and wounded on the ground. Then everybody looked around at his comrades, to see what scathe each had suffered. The casualties among the Americans were surprisingly light, but suddenly Frank uttered a startled exclamation.

"Your arm, Tom!" he cried. "You're hurt, old fellow! Come on Bart, Billy, let's see what's happened to him!"

"I know mighty well I'm hurt," admitted Tom. looking ruefully at his left arm. Below his elbow there was a neat cut in his sleeve, and blood was running down his arm and trickling from his finger ends. "But I don't think it's broken," he continued; "I can still move it."

Without wasting any more time in words, Frank drew forth a knife and slit the sleeve from wrist to shoulder. Then they saw that a machine gun bullet had ploughed a deep furrow across Tom's arm, but, by good fortune, had not, apparently, gone deep enough to touch or break the bone.

"Well, it might have been worse," said Frank in a relieved voice, as he proceeded to apply a temporary bandage. "But you're out of the fighting for a while now, my boy, and don't think I'm joking with you, either."

"Out nothing!" protested Tom, indignantly. "Why, say, you don't really think I'm going to be laid up by a scratch like that, do you? That doesn't amount to—" But before he could finish a party of medical officers and nurses approached them, and one of the doctors caught sight of Tom's rough bandage at once.

"Let me see your arm, young man," he commanded, and as Tom had no choice but to obey, he reluctantly held out the wounded member for the doctor's inspection. The latter deftly stripped the temporary bandage off, and after closely examining the wound, said, "Not as bad as it might have been," and, after applying a new and more scientific dressing, ordered Tom to report to the hospital without delay.

"Well, suppose I've got to go," grumbled Tom. "But I'll be back again with you fellows mighty soon, and don't you forget it!"

"Yes, yes, we know you will," said Bart, soothingly. "You'll be back, all right—in two or three months, that is."

"Well, I won't argue about it," said Tom, who by this time, in spite of his words, was beginning to feel rather sick and weak, "but actions speak louder than words." And with this he started off in the direction of the hospital, with the heartfelt good wishes of his friends following him.

All the rest of that morning the Germans kept up a desultory fire, but the American guns answered with such good effect that toward noon the Boche batteries appeared to have been silenced. But shortly after the midday meal they broke out again with redoubled violence, and soon the three friends were busily occupied in speculating

as to when the next attack would take place, and as to whether they or the Germans would be the aggressors. They were deeply absorbed in the fascinating game of war, when, in a lull in the firing, they were all startled by hearing a familiar voice say,

"Well, who was right now? I said I'd be back, didn't I, and here I am!"

All three turned, and beheld no less a person than their wounded friend, whom they had up to now thought "safely wounded" and in the hospital.

"H—how in the world did you get out?" asked Bart, who was the first of the astonished trio to find his voice. "We all thought you were laid up for some time to come in the hospital."

"So I was," said Tom. "But, although perhaps you don't know it, a hospital has doors, and once in a while windows, too," and he grinned cheerfully. "They were all so busy, and there were so many in there, that one more or less didn't matter, and I wanted to be out here with you fellows."

"Well, it's great to have you back, old fellow," said Frank, heartily, "if you think you're in a condition to get away with it."

"Of course I am," said Tom, scornfully. "The old arm feels pretty stiff, and all that, but I'm

hoping the Huns will give me a chance to exercise it and limber it up."

Nobody had any answer to this, as they all felt it was typical of the spirit of the American Army —the spirit that was making it invincible.

The afternoon passed by without any actual infantry attacks being made by either side, although the roar of the big guns was incessant. The four friends were intent at their loop holes in the sand bag parapet before them, shooting at anything that looked like a German helmet showing itself above the enemy trenches, and making more than one successful hit. Suddenly, from quite a distance in the rear, it seemed, came a mighty explosion that rent the air and shook the earth and made even the reports of the big guns seem puny by comparison. As though by mutual consent, for a brief space both sides stopped firing, and the comrades shot questioning glances at each other.

"Guess that must have been the end of the world," said Billy, who was the first to find his voice. "Something big went up in smoke then. I wonder what it could have been?"

"Probably an ammunition dump," guessed Frank. "I don't think anything less than that could have raised such a rumpus."

His friends were inclined to agree with him;

and, as it chanced, he had guessed right the first time. A big German shell had exploded in a pile of ammunition stored behind the Allied lines, in turn causing the tremendous explosion that they had heard. But they did not realize the full significance of the accident, as those in command did. The nearest reserve supply was almost two miles in the rear, and the loss of the main ammunition dump left that whole sector dangerously short of fighting material, until, at all events, more could be brought up. This was a matter of great difficulty, as the Germans, guessing what had happened, or perhaps definitely apprised of it by their observation balloons, immediately laid down a heavy barrage in the rear of the Allied trenches, with the design of cutting off the bringing up of fresh supplies.

This made it a work of the greatest peril to any one who had to drive a wagon or motor lorry loaded with explosives from the Allied trench through the barrage to the reserve station and back again. So great was the danger, indeed, that the commanding officer decided to call for volunteers, and with this purpose in mind, other officers went down the lines, calling for volunteers. The four Camport friends offered their services as one man, but by the time their turn had come, only two were required, and Frank and Bart were selected.

"Good-bye Tom! Good-bye Billy!" said Frank and Bart in turn, as the friends fervently shook hands. "See you later." But as they went bravely off, both Tom and Billy knew that the chances were all against their ever coming back.

But they had taken so many chances in this desperate struggle that they had begun to think that the bullet was not moulded that was to take their life. And, after all, if it were, what matter? They had already in their minds made the supreme sacrifice, and if, in the end, there was to be a soldier's death and a soldier's grave, what matter? It was sweet and glorious to die for one's country.

CHAPTER XVII

THE JAWS OF DEATH

FRANK and Bart were assigned to a heavily built wagon drawn by two horses, and, after receiving their orders, started bravely off. The fact that they were embarked on what stood a very fair chance of being their last adventure did not appear to damp their spirits in the least, and they laughed and joked with their companions. But as they neared the barrage, which had, if anything, increased in intensity, joking was laid aside, their faces set in stern lines and every faculty became concentrated on the task in hand.

For a wide space ahead of them the ground was tossed up in smoking heaps of earth, which constantly changed positions as fresh shells burst with tremendous detonations and dug deep pits in the tortured earth. It seemed impossible that any living thing could pass alive through such an inferno, but the two friends had seen the impossible accomplished too often to give up hope even now.

"Our only chance is to get through quickly," muttered Frank, and, so saying, he spoke to the horses and gave each of the already frightened

animals a sharp flick with the whip which sent them plunging madly ahead at top speed.

In a few seconds they were in the thick of the firing. The two boys crouched low in the wagon, which swayed and bumped wildly over the broken and torn ground. Shells burst all around them, but still they kept on at the same pace, the horses also seeming to realize that the only chance of safety lay in getting over the barrage zone as soon as possible.

The boys clung desperately to the wagon, which every second threatened to overturn and throw them out as it hurdled wildly over heaps of earth and at other times dropped into pits and shell craters. For what seemed an age, but was really only a few minutes, they continued in this manner, and then realized that shells were no longer bursting around them and that they had won clear, for the time being, at any rate, although they knew they would have to come back through the barrage after they had got their load of ammunition, when progress would necessarily be much slower, owing to the weight of the load.

"Well, so far, so good!" exclaimed Bart, drawing a long breath.

"Yes, but we've got to go further," said Frank, as he checked the frightened horses to a more normal pace. "I'm willing to bet those horses

never traveled so fast in their lives before. They seemed to be frightened about something, looked like to me."

"Shouldn't wonder if they were," grinned Bart. "If they hadn't traveled pretty fast, I was about ready to get out and set the pace for them myself. I'm like the darky soldier who, when asked if he wouldn't like to join the cavalry, said no, that when they sounded retreat, he didn't want to have to bother with a horse."

They proceeded steadily for a short time, and soon reached the reserve ammunition station. A few motor trucks had already reached it, but they were the first wagon to get there. Willing hands loaded the wagon with shells, hand grenades, and other essentials, and then, amid cheers and shouted wishes for their continued good fortune, they turned and started back toward the front line.

"Here goes!" said Frank, as they again neared the barrage zone. "A long pull and a strong pull, Bart, and we'll be through."

"What has been done, can be done," replied Bart, succinctly, and without further words, being now on the fringe of the belt, they lashed the horses to the best speed of which they were capable, and plunged into the maelstrom of death.

The bursting shells did not seem quite as numerous as before, and this was actually the case,

as the American return fire had succeeded in silencing some of the German guns. But it was still quite bad enough, and their progress with the heavily laden wagon over the broken terrain seemed tortoisely slow.

Neither of the boys spoke, and, indeed, words could not have been heard amidst the defeaning uproar in which they found themselves. Once a shell exploded just behind them, on the exact spot over which they had gone not a moment before, throwing the wagon forward and almost hurling both boys out and to the ground. They were not actually hit, however, and were just beginning to think they were going to get through safely, when a flying fragment of shell struck one of the horses, killing the unfortunate animal instantly, and bringing their progress to an abrupt halt.

Instantly both boys leaped to the ground, and Frank, drawing his sharp trench knife, cut away the harness from the dead animal, whose mate stood trembling and snorting from terror.

"We've got to get this load through, that's all there is to it!" shouted Frank, in Bart's ear. "It's up to us to take the place of that horse and get it in."

"I'm with you!" shouted Bart, and together, each seeming to be endowed with superhuman strength, they dragged the carcass of the fallen

animal out of the way, and, grasping such parts of the harness as remained attached to the wagon, put all their strength into the desperate task of hauling the heavily laden wagon the last half mile of the journey.

The remaining horse and the two soldiers struggled doggedly forward, at times almost stalled, but pulling out of difficulties by sheer strength of will power. It seemed as though they bore charmed lives amid the tempest of shot and shell, in which it seemed impossible for any living creature to exist more than a few moments.

But at last they came to the outer edge of the barrage, and with a feeling of wonder and relief realized that they had come through clear. They had made exertions that would have been considered impossible under ordinary circumstances, and yet were not sensible of any feeling of fatigue. Their nerves were still strung to battle pitch, and they had not yet had time to feel the reaction. They tugged forward with persistent strength, and were soon on a military road, with only a short distance to go to reach their own lines.

The waiting gunners caught sight of them first, and when they saw the strange team mates, and realized what it meant, a great cheer went up. Men rushed forward, and willing hands

rushed the wagon the rest of the way and quickly unloaded its badly needed contents.

It was two exhausted, begrimed, but triumphant soldiers who reported to headquarters that the mission entrusted to them had been successfully carried out.

"All I can say is," remarked the commanding officer to whom they made their report, after they told him the details, "that you both lived up nobly to the best traditions of the Army and of your regiment, and I am proud of you and congratulate you personally."

And it was two proud young Americans who returned to their companions, where they were forced to tell over again the story of their thrilling adventure, and its successful termination. Many of those sent out had not returned at all, but enough had won through to insure ammunition until a regular supply train could be established.

For Frank, the adventure had been a tonic that he needed after the depression he had felt when he had been unjustly accused of theft.

He had tried resolutely to put the matter out of his mind. The consciousness of innocence had buoyed him up. He had a supreme faith that everything would come out all right in the end. And yet there were times when even this failed to

help him. He felt as though he were entangled in a net. The whole thing seemed to him a nightmare. He had never before in his life been accused of doing anything tricky.

To be sure, he had not been accused now, but he had been suspected, and he had the uneasy feeling that although his officers had carefully refrained from showing any feeling, or even mentioning the matter further, he was being watched.

After the excitement of the day was over, the reaction set in; he was so quiet that his friends noticed it.

"What's the matter, old man?" said Bart, slapping him on the shoulder.

"Can't you guess?" returned Frank a little moodily.

"Oh, forget it!" cried Billy, catching at once his chum's meaning. "That thing's just a bad dream. It's just as sure as shooting that it will all be cleared up in a few days. As sure as there's an earth under our feet, it'll come out all right."

"Well, here's hoping," said Frank, trying to smile. "It's worth a lot anyway to have pals like you to brace a fellow up."

CHAPTER XVIII

FUN IN THE REST CAMP

It must not be thought that a soldier's life is all fighting without any pauses—"all work and no play," as it were. A regiment, after serving in the front line trenches for a few days, or possibly a week, as the case may be, is sent to some town quite a distance back of the lines, where the soldiers have a chance to get cleaned up, to rest, and generally recuperate from the wear and tear of the strenuous and nerve-racking days at the front. Were it not for this, no man could stand up very long under the terrific, vitality-sapping strain of contact with a dangerous and aggressive enemy.

So it happened that in due course of time the old Thirty-Seventh was ordered to a rest camp, being relieved by a fresh force. And, Billy Waldon remarked:

"We surely have it coming to us, if anybody does in this man's army."

The day after they arrived at their rest camp, a group of the soldiers, clean once more, and refreshed by a long night's sleep free from battle

alarms, were gathered outside the entrance to one of the numerous canteens scattered throughout the camp. Conspicuous among them were the four Camport friends, and the whole group was in the best of spirits, secure in the knowledge that their regiment had established a glorious reputation for itself, and that for a few days, at least, they were to enjoy the luxuries of clean clothing and dry beds to sleep in, after the vermin and mud infested trenches.

"It doesn't seem natural to have dry feet any more," remarked one of the group. "Mine have been wet so often that I was beginning to like it."

"Oh, you can get used to almost anything after a while," agreed another. "Trench life isn't so bad if you once get used to it. The first twenty-nine years are the worst, you know."

"Maybe by that time you're used to it and don't mind it," said a third, "but I'm not anxious to spend that long at it to find out."

"Don't worry about that, old man," chirped Tom. "Chances are the Boches will save you the trouble of finding out by the simple process of bumping you off the next time this outfit is sent back to the front line trenches."

"If that's the case," replied the other, "you'd better kill me now while I'm happy."

"Ordinarily I'd be glad to oblige," said the

accommodating Tom, "but my arm is still a trifle sore, so I'll have to ask you to excuse me for the present."

"Oh, I wouldn't trouble you for the world," laughed the soldier. "At any rate, wait till our rest period is up, and then I won't mind so much."

"Say, you fellows make me tired with all this murderous talk," interposed Billy. "There you are, offering to shoot up each other while I'm sitting here, thinking up a gilt-edged plan to save numberless lives."

"All right, I'll bite," said Bart. "What is this wonderful plan, if it isn't asking too much for you to tell us?"

"Well, it is asking a good deal," replied Billy, "and if I wanted to keep it to myself and get it patented it would probably make me rich and famous; but, as it is, I'll let you lowbrows in on it, and won't even charge you anything for it."

"I think you're dead right about that charging part," said Frank, dryly. "But go ahead! Shoot! It's possible that even you might have a good idea once in a dog's age, although I'll admit it's highly improbable."

"It's throwing pearls before swine, but here it is, anyway," said Billy, refusing to be insulted. "You all know that it's one of the Boches' favor-

ite and manly pastimes to bomb our Red Cross hospitals. Now, my idea is this. Simply camouflage every hospital to look like a brewery, and there you are. Simple, neat—" But he got no further, being forced to duck a shower of old newspapers, hats, and anything else that happened to be available as a missile.

"That let's you out," said Frank, severely, when the uproar had somewhat subsided. "From now on you will occupy a back seat and behave like a good little soldier, or something terrible is going to happen to you. I don't pretend to be much of a prophet, but I can say with authority that an awful disaster is going to overtake you if you pull any more of that stuff."

"Sorry you don't like my little offerings," said Billy, "and just for that, I won't tell you a really first class joke I heard this morning."

"It isn't an original one, is it?" asked Bart, suspiciously.

"No, it isn't quite as good as all that," admitted Billy, brazenly. "But I'm almost tempted to tell it to you, provided this bunch of bloodthirsty bayonet pushers don't jump on me afterwards."

"Well, if it isn't one you made up, we can't hold you responsible, no matter how rotten it is," said Frank, "so fire ahead."

"Well," began Billy, "it seems there was a col-

ored soldier in Camp Upton, who one day started to walk out of the gate, but was stopped by the sentry on duty there. 'Hey, there, how do you get that way?' asked the sentry. 'Why, Ah jes' wanted to take a little run into New Yawk,' answered Rastus. 'That part's all right' went on the sentry. 'But where's your pass? Don't you know you can't get out of the camp without a pass?' 'Didn't know nawthin' 'bout that, boss,' replied Rastus. 'Ah ain't got no pass.' 'Well, then, you can't get out, and that's all there is to it,' said the sentry."

Here Billy stopped for a moment, and noted with satisfaction that by this time quite an audience had gathered. Then he proceeded with his story.

"Rastus looked at the sentry a minute, and then he reached into his hip pocket and hauled out a murderous looking razor.

" 'Fella' he said, 'Ah's got a mother up above, Ah's got a father down below, and Ah's got a sweetheart in Harlem, and Ah's gwine to see one of the three mighty soon.' "

Billy's anecdote was received with a roar of laughter, and when it had subsided, Bart said:

"That was a pretty fair one, Billy, so I guess we'll have to forgive you the other."

"Thanks, awfully," said Billy, "I appreciate your good nature, I assure you."

"The darkies surely can fight, though," remarked one of the group, a private named Willis. "Nobody can say anything against the showing they've made so far."

"Right you are," agreed Bart. "They've held their own with the best in this man's war."

Just then one of the camp's mascots, a large and luxuriantly bearded goat, came ambling toward the group, and immediately became the center of attraction.

"Who's your namesake, Billy?" asked Frank, mischievously. "Some relative, perhaps?"

"Judging from his appetite, I should say he was blood-brother to a number of people around here," retorted Billy, "although I am naming no names, of course."

By this time the goat had reached them, and he surely lived up to the reputation of his tribe. He would pass from one man to another, accepting anything that was offered him in the way of food. It made no difference to this astonishing animal what it was, bits of cake, cracker, candy, or tobacco, it was all the same to him. If any one felt he had a cigarette to spare, the goat was perfectly willing to take that.

"I'm sorry I haven't a tin can handy to offer him," remarked Tom. "The poor beast is evidently very hungry, and I am sure that with that

discriminating appetite of his nothing but some dainty morsel in the tinware line will satisfy him."

"Shouldn't be surprised if you were right," acquiesced Frank. "Why, I'd almost bet that that goat could stand a year of army beans and not get indigestion."

"No, no, now you're going a little too far!" exclaimed Bart, in mock reproof. "If you had mentioned almost any other test, I might have agreed with you, but that is altogether too much. And what's more, I'll bet that goat thinks too much of his digestion even to try army beans. He doesn't seem very particular I'll admit, but still he's a long sight too particular for that."

"Well, come to think of it, perhaps you are right," laughed Frank. "And, anyway, as it would be cruelty to animals even to try the experiment, there's no use arguing about it any more."

"Right you are," said Bart; "but I'll take off my hat to that goat on general principles, anyway. There is a thoroughness about his methods that would put even a German to shame."

"Well, maybe he's the Kaiser's goat, and we've got him," suggested Tom, and a roar of laughter went up that caused several officers who were passing at the time to stop and look over curi-

ously, evidently under the impression that a small-sized riot had broken forth.

After this any serious conversation was out of the question, and many were the jokes bandied around, some really humorous, and others far short of it. Many funny and amusing incidents of army life were recalled. One fellow told of a case he had heard about, where the password for the night had been a rather long name of a French town. One soldier had been sent out on some errand, and when he sought to reënter the lines, was of course challenged by the sentry on duty.

"Halt, who goes there?"

"Friend, with the countersign," replied the soldier.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign!" commanded the sentry.

But the soldier only stood still and scratched his head. At last he exclaimed:

"Blest if I haven't forgotten the password!"

"So have I," replied the sentry, "Pass, friend."

This was appreciated by the boys, who, it is fairly safe to say, had many of them had similar experiences. But in some of the experiences narrated, tragedy was so closely intermingled, that a listener was not sure whether to laugh or feel sad. But to these virile young Americans, it was

all in the day's work, and they had seen so much of the grim side of war that they naturally, in their hours of recreation, sought to look on the brighter side.

The afternoon wore on pleasantly, and almost before the boys realized it, meal time had come. It would have been surprising to a spectator to have seen the magical way in which the different groups of soldiers melted away as the mess call reached their ears. As the four friends raced for the mess hall, Billy panted:

"Guess this war wouldn't be half bad if we could spend it all in rest camps."

"Not for mine!" exclaimed Frank. "I'd rather face bullets than some of those jokes I heard this afternoon. I'll have to eat 'seconds' tonight, just to get my strength back."

Nothing more had turned up in explanation of the mysterious robbery of the paymaster's clerk. Frank felt sure that if the real culprit had been found he would have been notified by his captain.

Every day that passed he knew would make it less likely that the real robber would be discovered, and the thought that he might forever rest under the cloud of suspicion was maddening to him.

"Who is that fellow in the story that had the

sword hanging over his head?" he asked Bart. "By a single thread, the sword I mean?"

"Damocles, I think," said Bart, after a moment's thought.

"Well," said Frank with a sigh, "I know just how that fellow felt."

CHAPTER XIX

THE GERMAN BAND

THE regiment was in rest camp for a little over a week, and then, rested and fit once more for the strenuous life at the front, they found themselves back in the turmoil of battle. The first day it was comparatively quiet, but on the second, the artillery of both sides became active, and toward nightfall it was rumored around from mouth to mouth that the American command planned to make an attack that night.

"So much the better," commented Frank, when he heard the news. "After the peach of a rest we've had lately, I feel in condition to go and get the Kaiser any time I'm told to, and I guess you fellows will go with me without much persuasion, won't you?"

"You can bet your last dollar on it, old timer," Bart assured him. "I've got a notion that a couple of Hun scalps hanging at my belt would add a good deal to the beauty of my uniform."

"Well, you may get a chance to get them tonight, old fire-eater," laughed Billy. "Anyway, if we come back without anything to show for it, it will be kind of queer."

As dusk fell that evening, the American guns increased the strength of their firing, which seemed to bear out the truth of the rumor that had been circulating all day. Then, about an hour before midnight, word came around that they were to go over the top shortly. The excitement among the men became intense, and Billy whispered to Bart:

"Guess you'll get your scalps all right, Bart, provided some German doesn't get yours first."

"There's always that chance, but I'm not worrying about it a great deal," replied Bart. "Guess we must be going pretty soon, judging from the length of time our artillery has been at it"

And, indeed, not five minutes after he had ceased speaking the command swept down the line, and with grim faces and joyful hearts the Americans scrambled out of their trenches and followed their barrage toward the enemy trenches.

The four friends kept close together, going steadily forward at a jog trot, heedless of the enemy shells that burst close to them. Vaguely through the darkness they could make out their comrades to either side of them, a silent, purposeful lot. Here and there, mortally stricken men and wounded men dropped out of the line, but in the main it pushed steadily forward, and

in a short period of time those furthest advanced reached the first of the enemy trenches.

The four friends were among the leaders, and as they made out the sand bag parapet through the obscurity, Frank yelled:

"Now's the time, boys. Give it to 'em, and give it good! Treat 'em rough!" And the others, answering with a shout, leaped down to grapple and fight with the lurking enemy.

A chaos of sound arose, composed of the rapid shots from automatic pistols, the shouts and cries of fighting men, and the groans and screams of the wounded. The four friends fought together as one unit, one helping the other if he seemed in danger of being overborne by weight of numbers, and, shooting and stabbing like demons, they fought their way along the trench.

The Germans held out for a short time, but they were no match for the wildly fighting and exulting Yankees, and were literally swept off their feet. All resistance in the first line of trenches having been overcome, the Americans were commanded to storm the second trench, and finally, having won that, the third.

"We've got them going," panted Frank, as the four friends paused a few seconds to reload the magazines of their pistols. "This last trench will be the hardest of all, but I don't think that will

stop us. Up and at 'em!" and with a hoarse shout the quartette swarmed out of the second line trenches and into the third.

Here the German defences were very complete, and progress was necessarily slower. There were many "cross trenches" that gave great trouble, and dugouts that had to be captured. The company to which the four friends belonged was assigned to take one of these dugouts. The lieutenant in charge ordered them to surround the entrance, and then called loudly on those within to surrender, telling them that they would be bombed out in the event of refusal. The response to this demand came more quickly than any one had anticipated, however. Hardly had the officer ceased speaking, when from within came the now familiar cry of *"kamerad."*

"Be on your guard, men," warned the officer. "Chances are they're so terribly scared that all they're thinking of is surrender, but it's possible that they may mean treachery, so we want to be prepared."

But it was a woebegone band that presently issued forth, and it was evident that the officer's warning had in this case been superfluous. The men issuing forth were dressed in gaudy uniforms, and each carried with him, instead of a weapon, some one of the instruments that go to

make up a brass band. In short, it was a full regimental band that the company had captured, and as this fact sank home, a roar of laughter went up. The musicians, however, appeared to see no humor whatever in the situation, and the melancholy expression on their faces elicited fresh laughter from the fun-loving Americans.

"Shucks!" muttered Frank, disgustedly, "we're wasting our time on game like this. What we want to get is the scrappers."

"Aw, quit kicking, will you?" demanded Billy, "I've got an idea in regard to these fellows that ought to knock the whole regiment cold when they hear about it."

"Is that so?" queried Frank, suspiciously. "If it's of the same general merit as a good many of your brilliant ideas I'd advise that we just drop it quietly now before it gets a chance to land us all in the guard-house."

"All right, I'll tell you what it is, and I think that even your stunted mind can see that it's good," replied Billy, indignantly. "Of course, it all depends on whether or not they turn over this bunch of musicians to us to take in or not. But if they do, what's the matter with marching them in to the tune of Yankee Doodle, played by their own sweet selves?"

"Not so bad," admitted Frank, while broad

grins spread across his face and those of his companions. "I'll speak to the lieutenant, and I'll see what I can do."

Accordingly, Frank approached the officer, and, after saluting, proffered his request. The lieutenant looked him steadily in the eye for a few moments, and then a twinkle appeared deep down in his own.

"I know very well that you and those three chums of yours have got some unholy scheme in your heads," he said, "but I suppose somebody has got to take them back to our lines, and you might as well have the job as any one else. Go ahead if you like."

"Thank you, sir," said Frank, and, saluting smartly, returned to his expectant friends.

"All right, fellows," he announced, "I've got permission."

"Good work," applauded Tom. "Go ahead and give these fellows their orders, Frank."

"Come on, you!" commanded Frank, addressing the sullen group of prisoners, who had been scowling and muttering among themselves. "Forward, march! and make it pretty sudden, too Get me?"

Apparently the Germans "got him" all right, for they made no show of resistance, and followed with docility as the four friends herded

them off, Frank in the lead, Tom and Billy on the flanks, and Bart in the rear. There were twenty-four men in the band of captives, but as they carried no arms this was considered a sufficient guard for them. Several had made as though to leave their instruments behind, but Frank curtly indicated that they were to fetch them along.

The engagement on this part of the front had ceased by this time, and the Americans, having taken all the objectives according to their prearranged plan, were now busy in consolidating their new positions. The boys with their captives were hailed everywhere with shouts and waving of hands.

"About time to start up the music, isn't it?" queried Billy, anxious for the success of his scheme. "What do you say, Frank?"

"Guess it is about time," agreed Frank, glancing about him. Then, turning to the prisoners, he commanded: "Play Yankee Doodle, Heinies! Yankee Doodle, *verstehen?*"

It was evident that some of the Germans did understand, as could be seen by the mutterings and shaking of heads that went on among them.

"Nein, nein," grumbled one or two.

"You won't do it?" said Frank, in a voice as hard and cold as chilled steel. "All right, then, we'll see what can be done to persuade you. Draw

your guns, fellows," he went on, addressing his three friends, and at the same time slipping his own heavy automatic pistol out of its holster. "One minute you get, and no more." This to the prisoners again. "One minute, understand?" and he held up one finger and pointed to his watch.

Of course, none of the boys had any idea of shooting down the Germans in cold blood in the event of their refusing, but the latter did not know this, and had no doubt that the "terrible Americans" would do as they had threatened. They glanced fearfully about them like trapped animals, but they could see no hope of escape, and already half of the precious minute had elapsed. Frank ostentatiously inspected his pistol, and then raised it to a level with his waist, training it on the captive who appeared to be the leader of the band.

"*Aber* we don't know your song, your 'Yankee Doodle,'" expostulated that person, who could speak broken English. "So how can we blay it?"

"He probably knows it all right," said Frank; "but you whistle it for him, Billy, so he can't get away with that excuse."

Billy whistled the tune through twice. "That's enough," commanded Frank, curtly. "Go to it, Fritz!" He addressed the leader, and at the same time pointing his automatic pistol in a careless manner toward that man.

The German scowled darkly, but turned to his men and gave an order. The musicians placed their instruments to their lips, and at a signal from the leader, broke forth into the stirring strains of Yankee Doodle.

"That's better," grinned Frank, while his friends cheered and then broke forth into uncontrollable laughter. "If that doesn't make a hit in this man's army, I don't know what will."

And certainly the little group of prisoners and guards won much appreciation as they went along, everybody within hearing distance stopping amazed, and then breaking forth into tumultuous applause as they realized the situation.

Pretty soon Bart, tired of nothing to do, demanded that the band play the "Star Spangled Banner." At this, however, the leader balked.

"*Nicht verstehen*," he said sullenly.

"Oh, yes you do," said Frank persuasively, his fingers toying with his pistol.

The leader looked uneasily first at the pistol and then at the sullen faces of his comrades.

"Quick now, quick," said Frank sternly. "It would be all right to keep the Kaiser waiting, but we Americans get rather peevish."

While the leader could not understand exactly what Frank's words meant, there was a certain element of menace in the tone that made him de-

cide that discretion would be a better part of valor.

With an ill grace, therefore, he acquiesced, and soon the strains of the national anthem, surprisingly well played, considering his denial, floated on the air.

"He knew it all right," chuckled Billy. "Those regimental bands are apt to be called on when any official visitation comes along, and they know the airs of every country. Now let's try him with 'Marching Through Georgia.' "

Here however, they had really run against a snag, for the bewilderment of the leader was too genuine to be mistaken.

"Whistle it, fellows," directed Frank.

They were laughing so that whistling was difficult, but the band finally picked it out bar by bar and it was to this rollicking tune that the disgruntled prisoners were finally marched up to the gates of the prison camp and handed over to the grinning guards in charge.

CHAPTER XX

HERDING IN THE HUNS

One evening, not long after the episode of the captured German band, the boys were surprised to receive a visit from their old friend, Dick Lever, the aviator. They had not seen him for a considerable time, and, needless to say, welcomed him with open arms.

"You are a sight for sore eyes, you old sky pilot!" ejaculated Frank. "Where have you been keeping yourself all this time? We were speaking of you just the other evening, and wondering what had become of you."

"Oh, I've been on the job, as usual," said Lever. "Believe me, boy, if you were in my branch of the service, you wouldn't be asking why I didn't get to visit my friends more. I'm kept so busy from morning until night that I don't get a chance to call my soul my own."

"Well, what do you think we do?" queried Tom, in an injured tone. "Think we have nothing to do but give pink teas and hold afternoon socials? We're kept pretty much on the go, too."

"Yes, and as I came along I heard the result of

some of your activities," said Lever, with a laugh. "I heard what you did with that German band you annexed, and I've been laughing about it ever since. That was one of the richest things I've heard of for a long time."

"It was pretty good fun while it lasted," chuckled Frank. "I wish you could have been here when we brought them in, because I know you would have enjoyed it. But something seems to whisper to me that you haven't been without some exciting experiences since we all saw you last. Suppose you come across with one or two of them. I know that you have a knack of getting in unusual scraps and then getting out of them in an unusual way, too. So speak up, and tell us all about it."

"Oh, nonsense!" deprecated Lever. "I've just been going through the regular routine—making observations, directing gun fire, and stuff of that sort," he continued.

"Oh, that's all, is it?" asked Billy, sarcastically. "And while engaged in those mild pastimes, did you ever happen by any chance to have an encounter with a German aviator, for instance? Or maybe it was some other little thing along the same line, just to vary the monotony."

"Well, I've had one or two brushes," admitted Dick. "But they were all in the way of business,

as you might say. But a couple of weeks ago I did get away with something for which I'm inclined to give myself credit, without seeming to boast about it."

"Ah, now we're beginning to find out something!" exclaimed Frank, triumphantly. "Go ahead and tell us about it, Dick. What did you do?"

"Well, I had been out on a scouting expedition back of the Boche lines," began Dick, with an air of resignation, "and, after getting the information I had been sent after, I had turned back toward our own lines. I was flying very low at the time, as I thought I might pick up some further information that would come in handy later.

"Suddenly, when I thought I had about gotten past the German lines, I saw a group of grey clad men crouching in a shell crater, about midway between our lines and the German trenches. Apparently they were hiding there, waiting for darkness to come before making an attempt to get back to their own lines.

"At first I thought I would give them a peppering with my machine gun, and then pass on, but I recollected that the captain had said that he needed some prisoners to question regarding a rumored attack the Huns were going to make

that same night. So it flashed through my head that it would be a great thing if I could bring some or all of those skulkers into camp with me; but at first glance it looked to be impossible."

Dick Lever paused a moment in his recital to grin at the interest he saw portrayed in the faces of his friends.

"Any one would think," he remarked, before going on with his story, "that you fellows had never done any work against the Huns yourselves. Why, I'll bet you've had adventures that would put mine in the shade."

"It seems different, though, that flying game," said Bart, in reply to this. "You get used to the things that happen on the land, but the air service is a different thing altogether. But never mind about that; go on and tell us what you did after catching sight of those Huns."

"Well, as I said," resumed Dick, "I was considerably up a tree when it came to making a capture, and I was in two minds whether to make the attempt, or just give them a salute with my machine gun and pass on. But one of the beggars settled the question for me, by starting to peg away at me with his automatic. The others did the same, and while they didn't have much chance to hit me, still I could hear some of the bullets whistle pretty close, and that made me mad.

"I tilted the old plane down at a pretty steep angle, and opened up in earnest with the machine gun. I saw two of them drop, and I guess that took the heart out of the others, because they threw their guns away and I could see them raise their arms in sign of surrender.

"After that I stopped firing, and pretty soon made a landing close to them. I was on the lookout for treachery, you can be sure, but they seemed to be so thoroughly scared that I soon decided that I needn't worry on that account. They were yelling *'kamerad'* like good fellows, and were altogether so panic-stricken that I would have laughed at them, if I hadn't been so all-fired disgusted."

"That's the way with them, every time!" exclaimed Tom. "They're regular bulldogs when they're winning, but when they think things are going against them they quit without an effort."

"Right you are," agreed Lever. "Anyway, this bunch did. But then my troubles weren't at an end, by any means. They were my prisoners, all right, but how to get them back to our lines was a problem that stunned me at first. They realized what I was up against, too, and I could see them exchanging sly looks.

"Well, at last I hit on a plan that I thought might work. I thought that if I made them

march forward two or three hundred feet, keeping my machine gun trained on them all the time, and then followed them up with the aeroplane, I might get them in after all.

"I made them understand what I wanted at last, and got them started off in a compact group. There were eight of them all together, and they knew that I had the upper hand of them as long as they were within range of the machine gun. Of course, I made as sure as possible that they had no weapons on them.

"After they had got a hundred or two feet away, I started my engine, and bumped along after them, going as slowly as I could, but still not nearly slowly enough. In two or three minutes I had caught up with them, and then had to stop again until they had another head start. They kept glancing back over their shoulders, and I knew that if they saw the slightest chance of getting away, they would take it.

"The ground was frightfully rough, of course, and it is a wonder to me how the old plane held together at all. It was about all I could do to stay in the driver's seat, and I expected something to give way at any minute. But it didn't, and gradually we began to get near the American lines. And the nearer we got, the slower the prisoners went, until at last I was forced to kick up the dirt

around them with a few bullets, as a gentle hint of what would happen to them if they hesitated too much."

"I'm willing to bet that was one hint that wasn't overlooked, either," said Frank, with a grin.

"You can bet your boots it wasn't," said Dick. "It livened them up a whole lot, and from that time on they seemed to give up all hope of escaping, and marched ahead just like regular soldiers. I jolted along behind in the old plane, stopping every few hundred feet to let them draw away from me again. The ground was all torn up with shell holes, and you can believe that was some of the most difficult driving I ever did. And it makes my head ache just to think of it now. But all the time we were getting a little closer to home, and every time I thought of the delightful 'bag' I was taking in, I forgot all about how rough the going was.

"Once I was pretty nearly scared to death, when I saw a Hun machine flying in my direction, and I knew that if he attacked, I would have to go up to fight him, and would then lose my prisoners. Luckily for me, though, either the Boche flyer didn't see me, or else had other more important business on hand, and kept right on, and was soon out of sight. This left me free to

take care of my captives again, and I speeded up their progress all I could, as there are many things that may happen in No Man's Land, and I was mighty anxious to see my Germans safely in the prisoner's cage.

"But, to make a long story short, nothing further did happen, and in a little while I had herded the Boches up to our outposts, where they were surrounded and taken away. And I was mighty glad to get rid of them, I can tell you. I got up into the air again as fast as I could, and reported to headquarters."

"Well, I'll be blest!" said Tom, drawing a long breath. "What did they say about it, Dick?"

"Oh, I'm entirely too modest to tell you," smiled that person. "Of course, they threw me a lot of bouquets, as you might say, but I couldn't see what was so wonderful about it, myself. Any one else in my place would have done the same thing."

"Maybe they would, and maybe they wouldn't," said Frank. "That doesn't alter the fact that you were the one that actually 'brought home the bacon,' and were the one entitled to the credit of it."

"Well, to my mind, it doesn't compare with your capture of that German band the other day," said Dick, with a chuckle. "I'd have given a lot

to have heard them playing 'My Country 'Tis of Thee,' or some other of our own old songs."

"It was pretty rich," agreed Bart, with a reminiscent grin. "I guess we can call honors even, when it comes to that."

By this time it was pretty nearly time for the bugler to blow taps, and after a little further conversation Dick took his leave, after exacting a promise from the four boys to visit him in his own quarters at an early date.

CHAPTER XXI

PINCHING OUT THE SALIENT

THE time had come at last for which the American army and, in fact, the whole American people, were waiting. It would not, perhaps, be too much to say that the whole world was waiting.

Germany and her allies were waiting with dread, and the rest of the world in hopeful, confident expectation.

The American army by this time had proved its merit. It had driven back the enemy in his thrust toward Paris. It had stood with Haig's divisions and blocked the way to many of the channel ports.

Even now at Belleau Wood, Château Thierry, at Fismes, on the Ourcq, the deeds of its fighting men had shed luster on America's arms. On all parts of the wide flung battleline American brigades and divisions, in conjunction with the British and the French, were smashing the Hindenburg line, covering themselves with glory.

Yet these were scattered actions, performed in concert with other nations and under foreign leaders.

For several weeks hardly a word had gone forth of the great American army that was gathering in Lorraine. Here lay the pathway into Germany. Here were Alsace and Lorraine, panting to be delivered from German tyranny. Here were the great iron mines of Briey from which Germany had drawn most of her supplies and without which she could not fight three months longer.

Here was the great fortress of Metz, the most formidable in Europe, circled with guns for thirty miles. Here was the mighty salient that had been held four years by the enemy who had defied all efforts to eject them.

Once let that salient be pinched out and the way was open—open to Briey, open to Metz, open to the Rhine, open to Berlin! And here, like a great thunderstorm, the American army was gathering, threatening to break at every moment and overwhelm the foe.

When would Pershing strike? The Army Boys themselves were asking that question, more and more impatiently as the days went by.

They were like hounds held in leash, eager to be at the throat of the enemy. In fact, the only criticism that was ever made of them in France was that they were too hard to hold, too eager to get into the fray.

"Seems to me we're wasting time here," said Tom, peevishly, one morning early in September. "Wonder what the old man can be waiting for."

"Hear General Bradford talking!" gibed Billy.

"Napoleon wouldn't be in it with Tom," remarked Bart.

"I wonder Pershing hasn't called him in before this," added Frank.

"But on the level," persisted Tom, "I'm hungry to get at those fellows. It's at least two weeks since we've had a fight, and I'm getting rusty."

"It does seem as if we must be almost ready," Frank agreed. "I know we've got over a million men here, and what that million can do to the Huns is a sin and a shame."

"Guns too," added Bart. "And more tanks than you can count. The only thing we need a little more of is aeroplanes, and they're coming along now faster and faster every day. I'll bet we'll be in action in less than a week."

Bart's prophecy was justified when two days later the word went through the army that they were to get ready to go into battle the next morning.

Long before dawn reveille sounded and the troops fell in line. The army was stretched out

like a gigantic pair of pincers, ready to close upon the foe and imprison him between its bayonet studded tips.

In ominous masses the artillery men were clustered around their guns, ready to lay down the barrage behind which the infantry troops could advance. In the front of the line were grouped the tanks, a certain number to each division to beat down the wire entanglements through which the troops would pour.

Officers passed to and fro, giving their last orders. The sacks of the men had been filled with grenades and their cartridge belts had been replenished to the full. The thunderbolt was forged and ready to strike!

In the ranks the men spoke in whispers.

"There will be some great work done this day," murmured Frank.

"It will be a black day for the Huns," muttered Tom.

"I wonder if they know we're going to attack?" queried Billy.

"They've probably tumbled to it," remarked Bart. "They've got their spies everywhere, and their aeroplanes have been hovering over us like a flock of crows the last two days. Probably they're standing at their arms there now, just as we are over here."

"So much the better," responded Tom. "It's more fun to fight face to face than it is to shoot at their backs."

"We'll be doing that before the day is over," predicted Billy. "When this bunch of doughboys gets started there's nothing that will be able to stop it."

Frank glanced at his radio watch and saw that it was within three minutes of the appointed time. One minute, two minutes passed. They gripped their guns and their muscles stiffened.

Crash! and with a tremendous roar the deep throated guns opened up. The earth rocked and reeled with the force of the discharge. A deluge of fire lighted up the silent ranks, row upon row that stood waiting for the word.

In most of the battles where the Army Boys had been engaged the barrage had lasted for hours. This time, however, it was planned that the infantry attack should begin almost at once to catch the enemy off his guard.

For full ten minutes the barrage continued, then it lifted and the order came to charge. As though moved by a spring, the silent army came to life. There was a rush, a yell, and the fight for the salient was on.

"Forward, boys! Forward!"

The tanks plowed forward, spitting out fire

like the dragons of old, and close behind them came the dense ranks of infantry, heedless of the storm of shot and shell that met them from the enemy's batteries.

On they went, faster and faster, until they neared the enemy's front line. Lanes were torn into them, but they closed instantly as fresh men took the place of the dead and wounded.

Then, like a thunderbolt, they struck the first line trench. There was a grinding and twisting and smashing as the tanks tore through. The machine guns of the enemy, thousands in number, sounding like so many trip hammers, poured forth their streams of death.

The regular formation broke into battling groups, locked together like two gladiators. The armies fought with every weapon they had at hand. Rifle, bayonet, hand grenades, all came into play. And at times with rifle butts and knives and even fists, they fought.

The German high command had ordered that the salient should be held at any cost. None knew better than they how important it was that their position should be maintained.

Their men fought with the fury of desperation, but the tremendous momentum of the American attack could not be resisted. Foot by foot, yard by yard, their lines fell back, leaving the ground piled high with dead.

Quicker and quicker the movement grew until at last the enemy broke and retreated to its second line entrenchment. The first trench everywhere was taken in that savage struggle of early morning, and when the sun rose its rays lighted up the Stars and Stripes floating in triumph over the apex of the salient that for four years had withstood all hostile attacks.

CHAPTER XXII

CHASED BY UHLANS

PANTING, begrimed; drenched with sweat, the Army Boys found themselves together as the lines paused to take breath and re-form.

"Any of you fellows hurt?" inquired Frank anxiously.

"Bullet ridged my shoulder," replied Tom. "But luckily it's my left one and it's only a scratch."

"I'm all right," said Bart, "though I tore my leg on one of those confounded wires when I was following the tank."

"I came through without a scratch," said Billy, who was a little more thoughtful than usual. "The old regiment's pretty badly messed up though, I'm afraid. That machine-gun fire was something fierce. Poor Milt Barlow got his when he was right alongside of me. Fred Anderson too, is down, though I don't know yet whether he is dead or wounded. And Wilson's got a bullet in his thigh."

"Hard luck," said Frank gravely. "They were bully good fellows, all of them. But whatever

the price we've had to pay for victory, you can bet it isn't half what the Huns have had to pay for defeat. They went down in heaps."

"And look at the prisoners!" cried Bart, as he glanced at the groups that were being searched for weapons before being sent to the rear. "Why, we've taken more in prisoners alone than all our dead and wounded figure up to."

"Yes," Tom agreed, "we can't kick so far."

"Well, if Tom can't kick it must be pretty good," remarked Bart.

"But just wait a while," said Tom, seemingly sorry to have made the concession. "This is only the first round. They're going to come back at us mighty hard. No doubt their second line is stronger than the first and it will be some job to take it."

"We'll take it just the same," said Frank decidedly. "We've got them going now. We've given them so many lickings this last few weeks that their nerve isn't what it used to be. After a while all we'll have to do will be to shout 'America' at them and they'll wilt."

"Wilt they?" quried Tom, sarcastically; a feeble pun which the boys disdained to notice.

"Here's where we eat, I guess," said Bart.

"Not on your life!" ejaculated Frank. "Guess again, old man. They're getting ready now to

order a general advance. You'd better reach into your kit and get some biscuits, because something tells me it will be a weary while before the traveling kitchens catch up to us."

"Seems to me they might put on more gas," grumbled Tom, as he munched a cake of chocolate that had been given him by the Y. M. C. A. "You know what Napoleon said about an army traveling on its stomach."

"Never mind," grinned Frank. "It won't be long before we'll get to Berlin and filling up in the restaurants of Unter Den Linden."

"Gee, you're encouraging," grumbled Tom. "I hope we won't have to wait as long as that. We couldn't possibly get there in less than two days," he added, sarcastically.

Even sanguine Billy agreed to this, but their chaff was interrupted by the short, sharp commands of their officers to form in line of battle.

Their thinned ranks had been filled by the reserves that had been hurried up. The newcomers were eager and ardent to do their share of the fighting, of which they feared they were going to be cheated, so that the second advance was made with the same ardor as the first.

This time the resistance was stiffer. The second line of trenches was far more strongly fortified than the first had been, and then too the go-

ing was now uphill, where formerly it had been on level ground.

The field batteries of the enemy sent heavy shells plunging through the advancing lines and took a heavy toll of death. But it was the machine guns that did the most fearful execution. There seemed to be no limit to their number. They were as thick as swarms of hornets, and their sting was far more deadly. In every nook and corner, behind clumps of trees, sometimes on platforms in the trees themselves, they sent out their messengers of wounds and death.

But the American boys had already learned how best to root out these pests. A frontal attack was too costly. So they employed the tactics of the Indians, taking advantage of every stump and rock and rise in the ground, deploying in open order, passing to the right and left, and falling upon the machine gun crews from the flanks and sometimes from the rear. The contests were especially fierce at such times, for the men that the Germans had put in charge of the machine guns were picked from their best, and often they died at their guns rather than surrender.

But in the close fighting of butt and thrust they were no match for the American boys, either in physique or staying power. One by one the nests

were cleaned out and the men who served the pieces were either killed or captured. It was the fiercest kind of fighting, but it could only have one issue where the combatants met on anything like equal terms. The Germans learned that day that they might as well attempt to stem Niagara as to stop Pershing's army when its blood was up.

Frank and his comrades were in the van of the fight. The old Thirty-Seventh distinguished itself that day even more than usual.

They passed the section of the trench that had been assigned to the regiment to take and drove the greater part of a German division out into the open country and cut them off from their comrades.

An adroit enveloping movement singled out one of the Bavarian regiments and severed it from connection with their support on the right and left.

Their leader, seeing that their plight was hopeless, surrendered, and all that was left of the regiment laid down its arms.

"Sort of a white elephant the colonel has on his hands here," remarked Frank. "Who's going to take those fellows to the rear? It would keep too many of us out of the fighting, and there's plenty more to do before we call it a day."

The colonel, however, was fertile in expedients, and solved the problem by commanding the German officer himself to lead his regiment under the convoy of a corporal's guard of Americans detached for that purpose.

Off they went to their own goose step to the great hilarity of the American boys who watched them.

"Just like a lot of cowboys rounding up a bunch of bronchos," remarked Tom disrespectfully.

"A pretty tame bunch of bronchos, if you ask me," said Billy. "They've had all the fight taken out of them."

The claws of the pincers were tightening. The tips were getting nearer and nearer together. At first they had been about twelve miles apart, now they were less than eight. Soon, if the Americans' present success continued, they would close entirely and the Germans who were not able to escape through the gap before that time would be compelled to surrender.

Through that gap they were pouring now, regiments of infantry, trains of artillery, squadrons of cavalry, all trying to get out before the pincers closed.

But the Americans were determined that they should not escape. All through that crowded day,

when defeat was rapidly becoming a rout, they kept at the enemy's heels.

The battlefield was strewn with abandoned material of all kinds; wagons, guns, food, clothes, and all the débris that marks the wake of a retreating army.

In the confusion of pursuit the Army Boys were unable to keep together. Caught up in swirls of fighting men, a battalion here, a regiment there, they were swept out of each other's sight.

Frank, in his impetuosity, found, as dusk was drawing near, that he had got too far ahead of his comrades. He stopped, a little bewildered, to consider. It would be a depressing end to this day of victory, he thought, if he himself were to be taken captive, and as it was he faced the imminent risk of that happening.

He was turning back to find his regiment when suddenly a squad of Uhlans came in sight, part of a cavalry unit that had been attacked and dispersed.

They gave a savage shout as they caught sight of the American uniform, and wheeled their horses to ride him down.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ABANDONED TANK

FRANK knew that here was a race for life. He knew, too, that every step was taking him further from his own comrades, for the Uhlans had cut in between him and his regiment and were pursuing him in the direction of their own retreat.

Nor would his pursuers be content with capture. He knew that in their present mood of bitterness and revenge they would cut him down without mercy if they could overtake him.

He had his rifle in his hand, but his cartridge belt was nearly empty. He felt it as he ran. Only two cartridges left, and his pursuers were at least a dozen.

On he ran, swift as a deer, in the gathering darkness. This, at least, was in his favor. If his wind held out, or in some way he could retard their progress for a few minutes longer, he might escape under cover of the night. Every moment the thud of hoofs came more clearly to his ears. His own breath was growing labored and his lungs felt as though they would burst.

He knew that his pursuers were gaining

rapidly, though his hearing told him this rather than his sight, for he did not dare look around.

Those two precious cartridges! The time had come when he must use them. Slipping one in as he ran, he suddenly turned, dropped on one knee, took careful aim, and fired.

His pursuers were so close that he could not miss, even though the dark tended to make his aim uncertain. With a scream the leading horseman threw up his arms and fell heavily to the ground.

His horse reared and plunged, and this, for a moment, threw the following Uhlans into confusion. But it was only for a moment. They came thundering on again.

Frank resumed his flight the instant he had fired. Ahead of him was a curve in the road, and beyond that a patch of woods, or what seemed like woods to his straining sight.

He rounded the curve, not more than a hundred feet ahead of his pursuers. Overturned in the ditch at the side of the road was an abandoned tank, crippled and deserted in that day's fight. It lay on its side, and the door through which the operator entered was open.

Like lightning, Frank had formed his plan. He threw his rifle far to the side of the road, gave one flying leap, and found himself in the tank's in-

terior. Close in those narrow quarters he crouched, panting hard. Another instant and the Uhlans thundered by.

It was so dark now that they could scarcely see fifty feet ahead of them. The sound of hoofs grew fainter and fainter until they died away utterly.

Would they come back when they discovered that their quarry had escaped them? And if they came, would the thought occur to them that he had sought the tank as a place of refuge?

He listened intently. Near by was that patch of woods, but lights were beginning to appear in it now, lights as of lanterns or of small campfires. Doubtless they were alive with Germans, resting there after the bitter fighting of the day.

By this time the darkness was complete, and he could raise his head above the level of the tank without fear of detection. He stood poised, ready, should he hear the sound of the returning Uhlans, to leap into the fields that bordered the road and lie hidden among the thick grasses until they had passed.

But they did not return, and Frank knew at last that as far as they were concerned, he was secure. He tried to get his bearings, but this was difficult.

However, the stars were coming out, and soon

in the velvet sky he caught the steady radiance of the polar star. Often this had served to direct his way. It should serve him now.

He knew that the general location of the American army was west by south, but how get there over these unknown roads or through the pathless woods?

But he must take the chance. If daylight came and found him where he was, he would probably be captured or killed. His only hope lay in action.

He leapt lightly out from the tank to the road. His gun was gone, and in the darkness it was only a waste of time to look for it. He still had his knife, however, and his automatic pistol.

In close action these would be as effective as a rifle, and in that thick darkness it was only close action, if any, that he was likely to experience.

He went on stealthily but as rapidly as possible, listening intently for every sound, feeling his way by a sort of sixth sense, but taking care not to wander from the road. This at least led somewhere. If he once got in the woods he might travel in a circle and find himself in the morning at the same place he came from.

Suddenly he heard a sound a little way ahead of him. He stopped instantly and strained his ears to listen. Again that sound came to him, faint, rustling, stealthy, as though of some one

who, like himself, was trying to escape detection.

Frank felt for his pistol and crowded close to a tree at the side of the road. The sound came nearer. Soon Frank could see the figure of a man taking shape in the darkness not ten feet distant.

Suddenly a star shell rose into the sky and, bursting, threw a greenish radiance over the scene, revealing to Frank's astonished eyes the unmistakable features of Nick Rabig!

CHAPTER XXIV

UNTANGLING THE MYSTERY

THE recognition was mutual, and before the light of the star shell faded Frank saw a look of deadly fear come into the traitor's eyes.

Quick as lightning Frank drew from his left pocket his flashlight and streamed it full in Rabig's face. In the other hand he held his pistol pointed at the traitor's heart.

Rabig had been carrying a rifle over his shoulder, but his slower wits were no match for Frank's, and he only had it part way down ready to level it when Frank's light half blinded him.

"Let go that gun, Rabig," Frank commanded in a low but tense voice. "Quick, now! I've got the drop on you, and at the least move I'll put a bullet in you. Drop the gun."

The weapon fell from Rabig's hand to the road.

"Now," said Frank, "throw off your belt. My finger's on the trigger, remember."

With hands that shook, Rabig obeyed.

"Now," Frank continued, "down on your knees and put your hands behind you."

Beneath the deadly coercion of that ominous

muzzle Rabig did as he was told. Keeping him covered, Frank picked up the belt, stepped behind his prisoner, and deftly tied his hands.

"Now," he said, "get up. March ahead of me. There won't be a second that I won't have this trained on you, and if you make a single false move it will be your last one. March, now."

Rabig obeyed, trembling with rage and fear, but powerless to resist. They had gone perhaps half a mile in this fashion when they came to a place that Frank recognized as that where the German regiment had been captured almost entire.

Beyond this was a multitude of lights, stretching for miles. There was a regularity about them, a lack of attempt at concealment, that indicated a triumphant rather than a defeated army.

This, too, agreed with the direction in which he fancied Pershing's army lay. Besides, as he looked, he could see groups of men with lanterns, passing to and fro upon the battlefield.

He gave Rabig an admonitory thrust between the shoulders with the muzzle of his pistol.

"To the right, there!" he said. "Straight ahead! Quick, now!"

There was a momentary hesitation, for Rabig knew as well as Frank what those lights portended. A sharper push, however, decided him, and he marched ahead, with the rage of a trapped

animal gnawing at his heart. It was like the march of a condemned man to the scaffold. But instant death threatened him if he disobeyed, and the future in that camp might still yield him a chance. He went on.

As they neared one of the larger parties Frank raised his voice in a shout. There was a moment of hesitation and evident listening, and then a group of men came toward him with lanterns.

As the light of one of them, lifted high, fell on Frank's face and that of his companion, a wild shout went up, and in a moment Bart and Billy and Tom were mauling and pounding their recovered comrade in delight that was beyond words.

There was a tumult of questions and incoherent exclamations. Frank's emotions were equal to those of his comrades, but through all the confusion and exitement his eyes and the muzzle of his weapon never wavered from the sullen figure in front.

"Take care of this fellow, boys," he said. "I've had him on my hands for the last half hour, and now it's your turn."

"Been grabbing off a Hun?" asked Tom, as he looked curiously at the prisoner. Then his voice rose to a shout. "Great Scott, it's Nick Rabig!"

"That's what," said Frank, glad to lower his

pistol, for his arm ached. "I thought you fellows would be glad to see him, and so I brought him in."

Rabig's features were a study as that battery of eyes, stern, accusing, full of bitter scorn, was focused on him. He looked from one to the other like a caged rat, his face working with hate, rage, but chiefly fear. What these men knew of him would hang him or put him in front of a firing squad.

"I guess the jig's about up," Rabig, said Tom. "The United States Government has been waiting a long time to get hold of you."

Rabig's face became livid.

"What have you fellows got against me anyway?" he whined. "Let me go. What good will it do you if I get shot."

"Lots," Bart answered. "It doesn't matter so much to us personally—although you've never given us any occasion to do anything but despise you—but you're a traitor, a double-dyed traitor. Who let that prisoner escape? Who had secret meetings with a German agent in the woods in the dead of night? Who was it who met a German colonel under the tree that time and got money from him? It's no use, Rabig, we've got the goods on you, and you know it."

"Let me go," again wailed Rabig.

A sudden thought came to Frank.

"Were you in Landes a few weeks ago?" he asked, abruptly.

A surprised look came into Rabig's face, followed by the shifty expression that they had learned to expect when he was lying.

"No," he said, hesitatingly.

"Yes, you were," Frank contradicted sharply. "And what's more, you saw me there. I called to you, and you looked around and saw me and then began to run. Come now, you've lied enough. Tell the truth for once."

A ray of hope came into Rabig's eyes.

"Will you let me go if I do?" he asked eagerly.

"No," said Frank. "I'm no traitor to my country, if you are. You'll have to take your chance. They may shoot you or they may not, but you can be sure of this, that if there's any mercy at all to be shown, you'll have a better chance by making a clean breast of everything. It's up to you."

Rabig hesitated a moment.

"I'll tell," he said.

CHAPTER XXV

VINDICATION

THE boys gathered around the captured Rabig.

"Fire ahead," said Billy.

"First," said Frank, "tell us how you came to be in the American lines."

Rabig flushed as those clear young American eyes were fixed on him.

"I was captured," he replied. "After Bradford saw me in the woods and I learned that he had escaped to his own lines, I knew that the game was up. They took me into the German army, and I was captured in a fight near the Hindenburg line.

"Of course they didn't know who I was any more than any other German soldier, and I was taken to a prison camp back of the lines. I knew it wouldn't do to stay there, though, because at any time some of the men of the old regiment might come along and recognize me."

"So I took a chance one night, slipped by the guard and got away."

"How did you get the American uniform?" asked Bart, curiously.

"I got it on the battlefield from a dead Ameri-

can soldier," answered Rabig. "I hung around then trying to work my way through to the German lines."

"It was you then that I saw in Landes that day," Frank stated, rather than asked.

"Yes," replied Rabig, reluctantly.

"Did you hear of any one being robbed up that way?" pursued Frank, looking squarely at his prisoner.

Again that shifty look came into Rabig's eyes.

"Cut it out now, Nick," warned Frank. "Remember your only hope lies in telling the truth."

"Y—yes, I heard about it," admitted Rabig.

"More than that—you did it," accused Frank.

The shot at a venture went home. There was no answer from Rabig, but the dead silence was in itself a confession.

"Go through his pockets, Billy," directed Frank.

Billy did so, and after a moment of fumbling brought forth with a triumphant whoop a long, flat wallet. This he opened, and as the others crowded around him, he drew forth five one thousand franc notes!

It seemed to Frank at that moment as though a thousand tons had been lifted from his heart. Here at last was vindication. Once more he stood before the world, his honor unsullied—it had

always been that in fact—but now it was that in the sight of all men.

He could hardly wait to reach his captain and lieutenant with the news.

"Come along, fellows," he said. "We've got all we need to know," and with Rabig still marching before them they hurried into their own lines and made their way to the captain's quarters.

They announced their mission to the orderly, and were ushered at once into the presence of their captain. Frank saw, to his pleasure, that the lieutenant too was there.

The captain looked up in some surprise as the party entered.

"Ah, it's you, Sheldon," he said. "Have you heard from Colonel Pavet yet?"

"No, sir," replied Frank, saluting. "But I don't need to wait for that."

"What do you mean?" asked the captain, curiously.

For answer the boys pushed Rabig forward.

"Here's the man that committed the robbery," explained Frank, not able wholly to conceal the elation in his voice. "I captured him to-night, and he's confessed the whole thing."

"Rabig!" exclaimed the captain, his features clouding with a scowl as his eyes fell on the traitor's face. "Where did you find him?"

"A couple of miles from here," explained Frank. "I was cut off from my command and pursued by Uhlan cavalry. I escaped, and on my way back I came across Rabig and brought him in a prisoner."

Rabig quailed as the captain's look cut into him like a knife. In that look he could read nothing but the doom that he had so richly deserved. At the captain's command, he repeated the confession that he had previously made to the boys, and when his voice had quavered into silence, Frank produced the pocketbook containing the five thousand francs. The captain and lieutenant ran over the bills, and then the former turned to Frank.

"Sheldon," he said, "I can't tell you how glad I am that you are vindicated. And I want to say right here that even when the evidence against you seemed blackest, I never in my heart believed you guilty. I'm proud to have a man like you in my regiment, and I'm prouder still after the splendid work you did in to-day's fighting. I'll see that the paymaster gets this money and that the whole matter is fully explained. You may go now."

"As for you," he said, turning to Rabig, who stood cowering before him, "I'll see that you have a fair trial. I can't promise you anything else, and I advise you not to hope for clemency."

He called an orderly and directed that the prisoner be taken to the guardhouse.

A more jubilant group could not have been found in France than the Army Boys as they left the captain's presence.

Frank felt as though he were walking on air. Once more he could hold his head high in the sight of all men. An incubus had been taken from his heart and life.

His comrades were scarcely less delighted. Out of affection for Frank they had studiously kept from mentioning the matter in his presence, but it had often been the subject of indignant conference among themselves, and they knew what a black shadow had walked day and night at their comrade's side.

"It has put new pep and life into this bunch," remarked Billy. "I feel as though I could walk right through the whole Hun army."

"Same here," said Bart. "And if to-day's work can be taken as a sample, that's just what we're going to do. It won't be long before we drive them headlong out of France."

How true that prediction was and what part the Army Boys played in making it true will be told in the next volume of this series, to be entitled: "Army Boys Marching into Germany."

That final triumph, however, was yet in the fu-

ture. For the moment the task they had on hand engrossed all the strength and fighting power of the American Army. That day's work had brought the jaws of the pincers closer together. The next day saw them shut with a snap. The salient was reclaimed, the way to Metz was opened and Pershing's army had covered itself with immortal glory.

On that night of triumph, tired but happy beyond all words, the Army Boys were passing division heardquarters just as the flag was run up on the staff.

Instinctively their hands went to salute.

"A flag worth fighting for!" exclaimed Frank reverently.

"Worth living for," put in Tom.

"Worth dying for," added Billy.

"The most glorious flag that floats," said Bart.

THE END.